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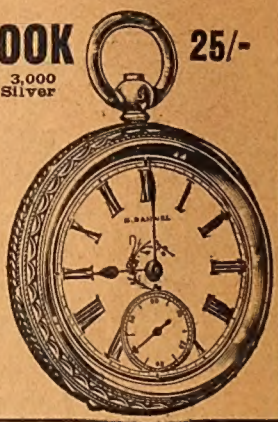

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 642.] For the Week Ending April 20th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE LITTLE DOOR IN BERKELEY STREET.

WHENEVER, during the later years of his remarkable professional career, Mr. Pontifex happened to be in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square, it was his custom to leave it by Berkeley Street.

And, as he passed down that well-known thoroughfare, a grim smile would flit across his shrewd features at the sight of a low door in a narrow area. The area skirted a small but luxurious town-house—the London residence of Lady Frances Boden, and the modest portal in question gave admission to a neat kitchen and servants' hall. This little door in Berkeley Street was connected with Mr. Pontifex's smile by a curious history.

One tempestuous day near the end of a bleak January, which had plagued the Metropolis with a succession of snow-storms, there was brought to Hugo Pontifex, at his offices in St. James', a scrawled note in a thick and scented envelope.

A District Messenger Boy delivered this into the lawyer's own hands.

"I was to bring it right to you, sir," he explained apologetically, "her ladyship made me promise her I would. And if you wished to reply, sir, I am to take the answer back, myself."

The solicitor signed for the missive and investigated its contents. They proved to be short and in the third person.

> Will Mr. Pontifex pray come at once to Berkeley Street to see Lady Frances Boden. She is in much distress and perplexity.

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Hugo Pontifex treated the bearer to a generous tip. The lad had insisted upon interviewing the great lawyer personally, and Mr. Pontifex liked that rare quality, obedience to orders.

"You will not need to return to Berkeley Street," he added. "I shall be with Lady Frances in a few moments."

The boy saluted smartly and took his departure. Mr. Pontifex, donning an immaculate "silk" and a big fur-lined overcoat, followed him out.

The gloomy afternoon air was full of dancing flakes; by the time the solicitor had reached his destination another snow-fall had set in.

Touching the bell of the dainty residence to whose hitherto unknown tenant he had been so hastily called, he noticed that the shutters obscured most of its front windows, a circumstance which suggested that the tenants were from home, or had but recently arrived in town. Also, while awaiting a response to his summons, Mr. Pontifex remarked that a burly police-constable, planted on the adjacent pavement, had begun to observe him with unmistakable deliberation.

A second afterwards, the lawyer was glancing over the threshold, not at the usual trim parlour-maid, but at an elderly woman clad in the stiff dark gown of a responsible domestic.

Mr. Pontifex gave her his card. She whispered mysteriously with some invisible companion and concluded by asking him to enter. The solicitor acted upon the invitation. Once inside, he found himself face to

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face with a strapping young fellow in extremely correct mourning attire.

"Excuse my spying on you," begged this person, cheerfully, "but I never knew how useful a letter-box slit was before, I unscrewed the case last night—my own idea! Awfully glad you've looked round—we're in a dickens of a mess. I'm Appleton, Captain in the Grenadiers, and a friend of the—of the family; Lady Frances is upstairs in her boudoir."

Mr. Pontifex gravely acknowledged the introduction and allowed himself to be guided to an upper story. Here, in a cosy apartment with drawn blinds and electric pendants ablaze, he encountered the author of that note, which had so urgently requested his presence. She was a typical Society dame, exquisitely dressed and still handsome, but, for the present, dissolved in tears. With her was a pretty girl, apparently of twenty summers or thereabouts, whose soft cheeks bore the traces of recent weeping.

His new and nervous client was calmed by the cool self-possession of Hugh Pontifex.

"Lady Frances Boden," said Captain Appleton, indicating the elder of the two, "Lady Frances, this is Mr. Pontifex."

The lawyer greeted her politely; his new and nervous client was calmed by the cool self-possession of Hugo Pontifex.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Pontifex," she murmured, "on the recommendation of Captain Appleton—who has heard your powers of avoiding scandal most highly spoken of. If you can help us, please, please do—otherwise there is nothing for us but public disgrace."

"Perhaps," broke in the Captain, "I had better explain, Lady Frances." The gallant officer twisted a ferocious moustache and cleared his throat.

"The fact is, Mr. Pontifex," he confessed, "Mr. Boden—Mr. Percival Boden, Lady Frances' husband—has not, we are afraid, been running perfectly straight and has finished by getting the law upon his track. A trifling misunderstanding about an acceptance—unfortunately the gentleman whose name is on several discounted bills, alleges that he didn't place it there. Not to put too fine a point upon the matter, Mr. Pontifex, the police are trying to arrest Mr. Boden for—for forgery."

Lady Frances groaned, and the more youthful mourner choked over a sob.

"Don't cry, Carrie," muttered Captain Appleton, consolingly, "Mr. Pontifex will pull him through, I'll swear."

"My daughter and I were in the country when we first learnt of it," said Lady Frances, miserably, "and travelled up, to be on the spot, and, if necessary, obtain legal advice for Percival, who had been staying at his club. Of course we did our best to settle this without fuss, for my fortune is secured to me and Percival has not been able to squander that as he has his own. But a warrant had already been granted and we were powerless. We went to a hotel for a day or two—my servants all being in Hertfordshire, with the exception of a housekeeper and a kitchen-maid."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders and checked Lady Frances' flow of talk.

"The real trouble, Mr. Pontifex," he declared, "is simple but disconcerting—yesterday Lady Frances received word from her husband. He had contrived to gain a haven here. The housekeeper is a faithful soul, she kept the other servant in the dark and stowed Mr. Boden away. Unluckily, the police had traced him here and insisted on a search. Miss Boden sent for me and I was bound to warn her that resistance would be futile. She persuaded her mother to admit the detectives, though not until I had disposed, temporarily, of the individual they wanted. You might like to contemplate the device by which I cheated one smart inspector and three plain-clothes constables. That will afford you an opportunity of making Mr. Boden's acquaintance."

With an apology to Lady Frances he drew the lawyer from the room and led him to the garret floor of the compact dwelling.

In the wall of a cramped attic was a large and sombre closet. The Captain whistled peculiarly, strode into it, and lighted a match. Mr. Pontifex saw that it held a huge

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slate cistern. Upon a beam by the tank sat a dishevelled man, his linen dirty, his chin unshaven, his garments bedraggled.

"Mr. Boden," pursued Captain Appleton, genially, "Mr. Pontifex—Mr. Pontifex, Mr. Boden. Mr. Boden, Mr. Pontifex is a clever solicitor who will endeavour to arrange for your escape from that fate, which, I regret to believe, you have richly deserved."

Percival Boden growled an indistinguishable sentence, the Captain paid no attention, he was showing Mr. Pontifex that the cistern had been emptied of its usual contents.

"My idea," he said, "had it run dry, boosted him in, and not an owl of the lot guessed the trick. But, to be safe, I made Boden start the cock into a half-full bucket when they got this far, and the gurgle of the water sounded so natural they never suspected how near they were to their prey. Ha-ha!"

He led the solicitor away, laughing boyishly.

"Boden is a bad egg," he confessed frankly, "and I'm not a bit sorry for him. Indeed, I should be very glad to know that he was out of England, with the best of reasons for not setting foot on the old island again. I'm to marry Miss B., and though Lady Frances is a trump, Boden really has been rendering himself too notorious. I owe him a grudge myself, for all he is Carrie's father—he had the impudence to oppose our engagement—and it tickles me to keep him shut up in that loft. However, I'm certain the inspector wasn't satisfied, for a couple of constables have been posted back and front of the house. Any hour we might be subjected to a further domiciliary visit, and then B. would have to dive into his cistern again. He was a fool to come here!"

"Quite so," said Mr. Pontifex, stopping on a carpeted landing, "but may I inquire, Captain Appleton, why I have been consulted in this business? Would you have me become an accessory after the crime?"

"For Heaven's sake don't consider that," begged the Captain, "think of poor Lady Frances and of her daughter. How would they endure the shame of a trial? The bills shall be met to the last penny, I swear it, Mr. Pontifex. But Boden must be smuggled abroad. They say you are a genius in desperate straits such as these; tell me what to do with that rogue and forger under the roof there, and two women—to say nothing of Leonard Appleton—will bless you all their lives."

The solicitor sighed.

"You plead eloquently, Captain Appleton," he said, "very well, I will do as you wish, but, to be honest, it is purely for the sake of that pair blue eyes in Lady Frances' boudoir."

"I say, sir," cried the officer, "you are a brick! But what is to be the game. I admit myself stumped. If those bobbies were not glued to the only exits there are!"

Mr. Pontifex reflected, twisting his sapphire ring.

"How long," he inquired, "has the policeman in Berkeley Street been at his post?"

"Not more than a couple of hours," answered the Captain, "his predecessor was relieved about two o'clock. Carrie has been watching for any tokens of a fresh raid and so saw the change of sentries."

The lawyer peered through a convenient casement which lit the landing. Night was enfolding the Metropolis, the snow still descended. Hugo Pontifex smiled suddenly.

"Captain Appleton," he said, "I recollect that Lady Frances mentioned a housekeeper and a kitchen-maid as being on these premises. The former is in the secret, the latter, I gather, ignorant of it. She must be dispatched about some business that will detain her most of the evening. Kindly arrange this with Lady Frances while I instruct Miss Boden."

The inquisitive officer re-conducted him to the boudoir and motioned Lady Frances from the apartment. Mr. Pontifex sat himself down by the girl with the blue eyes.

"Miss Boden," he began, "I shall need your assistance

Percival Boden growled an indistinguishable sentence.

in a project which smacks more of the stage-manager than the lawyer. But never mind that. As soon as the kitchen-maid—whose absence Captain Appleton is procuring—has been packed off, you will please assume her character, and, in addition, one of her costumes. I am going into Piccadilly upon a slight errand; when I get back you shall be coached in your new *rôle*."

He picked up his hat, buttoned his coat and sallied forth into the storm. At a Piccadilly chemist's he made a purchase—a little white powder. His rooms were in the Albany, hard by; the assistant knew him.

On the solicitor's return he beheld the identical constable kicking his heels outside the area railing, a chilly and wretched being. Mr. Pontifex smiled grimly and vanished over the threshold at which the policeman stood guard. Nodding to the anxious housekeeper, the lawyer hurried upstairs and passed into the boudoir.

The girl with the blue eyes had performed his bidding

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to the letter. And a charming Phyllis she made, if a rather nervous one.

"What can you propose to do, Mr. Pontifex?" asked his bewildered client.

The solicitor pulled off his furred coat, threw down his hat, and started to unwrap the powder he had purchased from the Piccadilly chemist.

"May I trouble you for a piece of sugar, Lady Frances?" was all he would say.

The mock kitchen-maid fetched him a bowl full of the sparkling lumps. With his pen-knife, Mr. Pontifex dug a hole in the largest fragment he could discover and emptied the powder dexterously into it.

"Now, Miss Boden," he told her, "we are equipped. Do you imagine you can tempt that awkward policeman at the area railing to take an interest in hot whisky-and-water, sweetened—with that piece of sugar?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Captain, admiringly, "and then——?"

"We shall see," retorted Mr. Pontifex, "but tell Mr. Boden to wash himself, get into some inconspicuous sort of suit—the shabbiest he can rake up—and put what things he may want into a kit-bag."

"I will do that for him," said Lady Frances tearfully, "but I'm sure I don't in the least comprehend your scheme, Mr. Pontifex."

"It is not necessary that you should," asserted the lawyer, drily. "Miss Boden, will you pilot me to the basement? I shall require your aid also, Captain Appleton."

On their way to the lower portion of the house, Mr. Pontifex scrutinized the pretty countenance of the Captain's betrothed. It was flushed with excitement, but the red lips were firmly set and the blue eyes steady. His view of her satisfied the solicitor. In the lobby by the servants' hall Mr. Pontifex halted.

"I must leave the rest to you, Miss Boden," he said, "this is your doctored lump of sugar, it will affect the patient almost immediately. Not that it will harm him in the least."

He patted her hand reassuringly as she took the sugar-bowl, registering the position of the important fragment with her small thumb. She moved slowly into the kitchen, placed the bowl on a dresser, and stole to the area door. Mr. Pontifex and the Captain strained their ears, they could catch a glimpse of the coquettish figure through a tiny window in the wall of the passage. The policeman on the pavement turned as the light streamed up through the open door. He was covered with snow from shoes to helmet. The mock kitchen-maid gazed up at him, her woman's wit prompting her.

"I say," she called, with an affectation of innocence, "do tell me what master's done—if it is him you're after, with your searchings and your prowlings."

"It's a case of forgery, my dear," said the constable, patronisingly, peeping through the railings, "and for a thousand or two at that."

"Dear, dear!" was the rejoinder, "how shocking! And isn't this an awful night for you to stand out there all these hours?"

"Duty must be done, my dear," answered the policeman heroically.

"Would you—would you like a drop of something hot?" said the girl, "there's nobody about but me and I could get it for you in a twinkling. I—I have a brother in the force, you know."

The constable wiped his dripping moustache with a big bandanna.

"It—it'd be very welcome," he murmured cautiously, "if you could slip it up to me without anyone seeing."

"Of course I can," said the other, "it's not the sort of evening for people to bother about anyone's business but their own."

"You're right," agreed the constable, "then I will have a nip, my dear, just to drink promotion to your brother, if he's half as good as you he deserves it."

The mock kitchen-maid blushed prettily, and went in to get out the whisky bottle. The policeman observed her appreciatively through the kitchen window as she

"It — it'd be very welcome," he murmured cautiously, "if you could slip it up without anyone seeing."

prepared the steaming mixture, popped in the momentous lump of sugar and skilfully stirred the beverage. She brought the tumbler into the area and passed it up; the constable consumed it in a couple of luxurious gulps.

Caroline Boden received the glass with trembling fingers, she was watching the stout form in the wide oilskin cape. What was to occur next?

The constable leant against the railings, brushing his moustache with his bandanna, his head swayed and his legs bent abruptly. Mr. Pontifex had crept up behind the mock kitchen-maid; he drew her in quickly and shut the area door.

"Captain Appleton," he commanded, "take your hat and hurry out into Berkeley Street. You will find a prostrate constable: he has been overcome, you under-

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stand, with the cold. Send for brandy and attract a crowd, I will deal with Mr. Boden."

The Captain regarded the lawyer in amazement.

"You are a marvel, sir," he said reverently, and roused himself from his stupor to dash off upon the indicated mission.

Mr Pontifex grasped the pink fingers of Captain Appleton's disguised sweetheart.

"My 'compliments," he told her, "you did that excellently. And now for your father."

He returned to the boudoir, where Mr. Percival Boden, in his shirt sleeves, was superintending the filling of a capacious leather bag.

Mr. Pontifex took it calmly from Lady Frances, shut and hasped it, and tossed it to his client's husband.

"If you wish to escape," he said sternly, "come with me instantly."

"Good gracious!" cried the forger, and flung on the rest of his attire.

Mr. Pontifex caught him by the arm and hastened him downstairs. The old housekeeper let them out.

On the snowy kerb a crowd had collected. Captain Appleton in its midst. The drugged policeman had been propped up by a friendly knee and brandy was being poured into his mouth.

Mr. Pontifex chuckled. "If that constable wakes under two hours," he muttered to himself, "I will never trust morphia again. How he will puzzle the divisional surgeon!"

The lawyer grasped the arm of Mr. Percival Boden and conveyed him into Piccadilly. Mr. Pontifex hailed a cab and drove to St. James', alighting near the block which held his offices.

From an alley in the rear of this building a sombre corridor yielded admission to the solicitor's private room, by means of a second door to that useful apartment.

Mr. Pontifex entered the dim chamber, and drew the heavy double curtains.

This precaution achieved, he switched on a single shaded lamp, opened his safe, took out a slender stone bottle and tilted some fluid into a porcelain dish.

"Rub your face, neck, and arms with that," he desired.

Percival Boden obeyed meekly; when he had finished he looked as if he had been exposed for ten years to the rays of a tropical sun.

"Now," he said, "you will pass for a sailor, but don't use any soap till you are out of Britain. And sell that kit bag for a canvas sack at the earliest opportunity."

He gave the newly-made tar a tiny bag of gold and set him free.

Percival Boden stalked off disconsolately in the driving snow. Mr. Pontifex never saw him again. Neither, for the matter of that, did any member of an English police force.

* * * * *

The morning papers duly recorded, as among the incidents of the night's storm, the fact that a constable, on special duty in Berkeley Street, had been overcome by the cold and carried to the hospital. But, so far as the public were concerned, the nature of the special duty remained a mystery.

Yet Miss Caroline Boden—then, however, Mrs. Leonard Appleton—was audacious enough to write, on the fancy box of wedding cake she forwarded to Mr. Pontifex: "With the kitchen-maid's most grateful remembrances."

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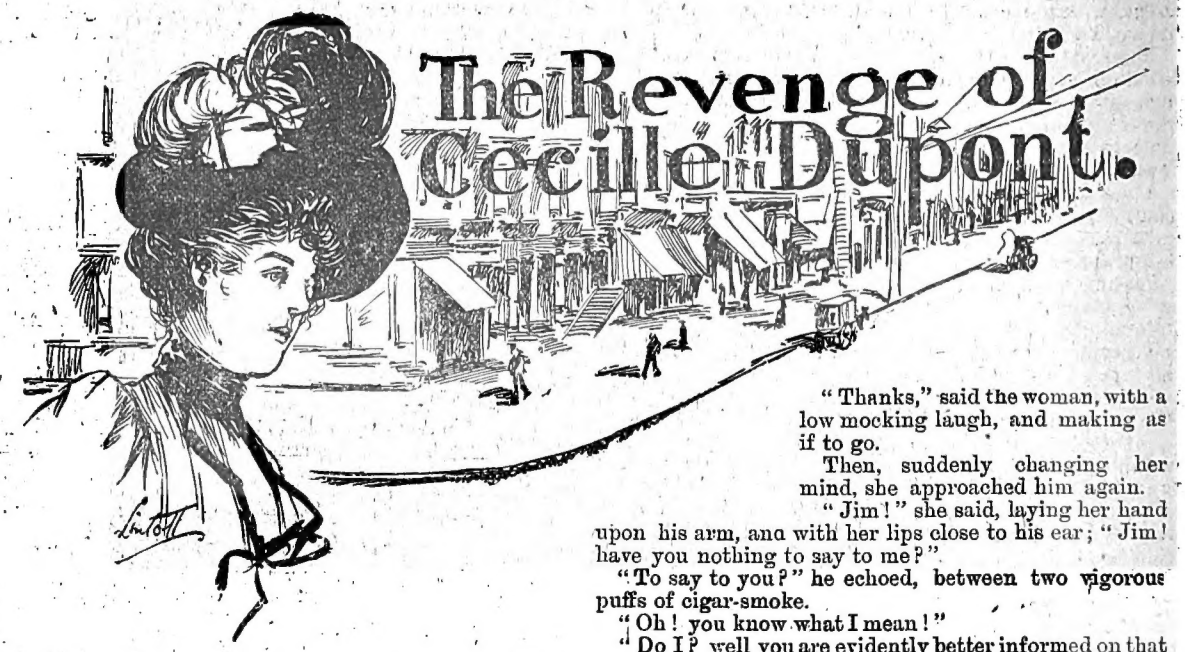
The Revenge of Cecille Dupont.



MARKET STREET, San Francisco, is a wonderful thoroughfare; and, on a certain sunny morning in the month of June last, its thronged sidewalks, crowded stores, and air of general prosperity, testified convincingly to the soundness of its claim to be the busiest street not only in the great Californian city, but in the whole wide world.

Old travellers in these parts will well know the Palace Hotel on this street; stupendous; luxurious; bewildering. They will remember, too, the beautiful vast inner court, with its shimmeringly white colonnades, its palms, and its fountain.

It is here; on this same June morning; that a man and a woman, both fashionably dressed, are in close conversation. The man is a fair specimen of the keen-eyed, sharp featured Northerner, while the woman, in spite of her fine feathers, is evidently of a class knowing far more of "below" Union Square than of Fifth Avenue. New York is as rich in social distinctions as are London and Paris, and the pair in question, arrived overnight from the Empire City by the "Union Pacific" Express, are but a sample of the bulk of the "all sorts and conditions" that go to make up the population of the great cosmopolitan seaport.

"You're sure he's got here?" said the man, meditatively "chawing" his cigar.

"Sh! speak lower; that nigger over there may have sharp ears. Yes, he's here. I saw him leave the steamer, and take a 'hack' for the National Bank."

"Good! now, I'll leave things to you, and get to the Cliff House. You know the idea, persuade him to shift to there, right away if possible, for Pablo's a queer cuss, and I don't think he'll stand much waiting. Crack up the place—but, there, I needn't teach you how to 'blind' him."

"No, leave him to me, and I guess you and Lello will make your 'deal' without much trouble or loss of time."

"Cecille! I always do say that you're a smart girl, and if you only carry this through to the string-end, I'll swear to it."

"Thanks," said the woman, with a low mocking laugh, and making as if to go.

Then, suddenly changing her mind, she approached him again.

"Jim!" she said, laying her hand upon his arm, and with her lips close to his ear; "Jim! have you nothing to say to me?"

"To say to you?" he echoed, between two vigorous puffs of cigar-smoke.

"Oh! you know what I mean!"

"Do I? well you are evidently better informed on that point than I am."

"Why won't you take me more into your confidence. You say to me 'go here'—go 'there!'—but the why and the wherefore you hide from me—you hide from me! It is not fair!"

"That's as you think."

"Heaven knows!" she went on, "you brought me down low enough when you married me! Me! the child of the old 'Knickerbocker' Enslers!—the belle of the 'Four Hundred!'"

"Well," he interrupted her, "what is it that you are aiming at? You were free, I suppose, to marry me or not, as you liked, and as for my confidence—why—I prefer to keep it."

"You are a demon! I will not be a mere slave any longer! It is not you who have made the sacrifice! it is I!—I!—I!— Heaven help me! it is I who have given you all; you have given me—nothing! From the first you deceived me! How was I to know that Orrin Dupont, the suave society man, the apparent millionaire, was really Jim Bloodgood, the arch-swindler and common thief!"

"You jade!" hissed the goaded rascal between his teeth, and wincing in spite of himself. "I'll be even with you—mark me! Get about your work!"

"Will you not at least tell me what you propose doing with this Englishman?"

"No."

"Hard!—hard as stone! You won't tell me?"

"No!" he repeated, savagely, "and no! again."

"You will regret it, then," she said, moving away from his side. "Regret it when it is too late."

"I can look after myself," he sneeringly replied, "and—you—you can go where you like."

Looking him steadily between the eyes for an instant, she turned abruptly and left him.

The man lingered a moment, lounging against a pillar, looked admiringly after her, and then strolled leisurely out through the main entrance into the street.

Straight on up Market, and through, in on oblique

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direction, innumerable cross streets, until he reaches the outskirts of China-town.

Here, at the end of a dark, dirty, narrow street. Orientalised by the many-coloured signs and fluttering rags, and which runs right through the heart of the quarter, the man halts and hesitates a moment, looking intently up at the top-floor windows of the tenth house down.

A scarlet handkerchief waved twice out of the casement, and he moves quickly up to the dwelling, the lower part of which is an evil-odoured, low-class Chinese restaurant.

Passing rapidly through the shop, he is met half-way up the stairs by the owner of the handkerchief.

Pablo, the half-breed, the dusky treader in the dark and devious ways of the Golden City, knows his man, and upon the principle of "rogue mistrusting rogue," expresses neither gratification or the contrary at the other's advent.

The room they reached, and the door of which the Indian carefully fastened by means of a weighty wooden bar, fitting into the socket in the wall, was alike small and squalid. The little dormer window was now shut, rendering the atmosphere of the place unbearable almost to an incomer from the outer air.

"Now, Pablo!" said the man, a trifle irritably, "is everything ready? Quick! and tell me, for very much of this room would about kill me, I think. Is the plant made?"

"Yes, the things are these," replied the other in fairly good English, "but look you, you've made a mistake with Miss Cecille."

"How, a mistake?"

"Why, she knows too much—I don't trust her."

"Shu! Cecille's a true girl. I'd as soon suspect myself or you. Besides, Lello's responsible for her, and he's not likely to nail his faith to a corn-cob."

"Oh! well, all right, she can't hurt me, I'll take care of that, you and Lello must look out for yourselves."

"See here, Pablo, my friend, never fuss over unlikely possibilities. The main thing is your return to Coloma to-night, and that you meet us at Gospel Gulch at sundown, day after to-morrow—savee?"

"Aye, I'll be there. Shall I take Ah-Su with me?"

"Well, I guess so; that wily Chinaman may be useful as a super in our little play. Now, unlock the door. Mind!" turning to leave the room, "Sundown, Friday."

"I've said I'll be there," returned the Indian, impassively, and as the footsteps of his visitor died away down the rickety stairs, he muttered meditatively yet in a half-restrained, angry, impatient way:

"I think you're playing the 'twist' game with me, Mr. James E. Bloodgood; that is, if I may trust my eyes to rightly read yours. Well, you're mighty smart, I know, but if you can 'throw' me," with a grim chuckle, "I give you full leave, my noble New-Yorker."

* * * * *

At the office counter in the great entrance hall of the "Palace," a gentleman, unmistakably English, is making his domiciliary arrangements with the clerk.

"Guess this letter's for you; Henry Babbington Clough Es-quire?"

"Thanks, that's me," said the newly-arrived. "But I don't know anybody here; and it's local," turning the missive, dainty, pink, small, and with just a faint suspicion of scent about it, over and over.

"Best open it," caustically said the clerk shifting his cigar lazily from right to left.

"True!" good humouredly laughed the gentleman, a youngish, fair-haired man of thirty or there abouts.

"Jim!" she said, laying her hand upon his arm, "have you nothing to say to me?"

"The writer wishes for a few moments conversation with Mr. Clough at once."

That was all.

"'Um—no date—no address—no name. Odd!" Then to the clerk, "Lady give you this herself?"

"Guess so."

"What was she like?"

"Elegant!—Paris fashions—New York stamp; but knows cast iron from 'hickory," should say."

"Well, if she asks for me, let me know will you."

"No 'casion, she's right there, over against the elevater door. Waiting you, I guess."

"Good gracious! Excuse me, madan, but are you the writer of this note, and—do you wish to see me?"

"That's so, I am, and do. Come into the court it's quiet there."

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A certain little impervious way she had, very pretty, which puzzled him, even while he almost unconsciously yielded to its influence and followed her.

Close by the marble basin in the centre of the court she stopped, as if by design, for the plash of the descending water would assuredly prevent any inconvenient overhearing by undesirable eavesdroppers.

She was a woman most men of ordinary calibre would have been attracted by. Of medium height; half Spanish in feature and bearing, she had that audaciously piquant way of speech and movement, which to the northern male is so alluringly suggestive of mystery and romance.

But now, somehow, a peculiar change had come over her. She was quiet, sadly so, and appeared to be possessed by an anxious feeling of some sort. This gave to her an added grace and charm, for it indicated, not uncertainly, the real woman.

"Aye, I'll be there. Shall I take Ah-Su with me?"

"You are a rich man?" said Cecille at last, abruptly, reaching over, and laying one hand in the sparkling water.

"Well, yes, I suppose I am," replied her companion, not a little astonished at the strangeness of the query.

No sense of caution or reticence, as to his acknowledgement of the soft impeachment troubled him; he seemed to be under a spell, as it were, of intuitive confidence in his interrogator.

"I asked you the question," she said after a pause, "but I knew all about it," then with a suddenness which almost startled him, "will you do me a kindness?"

He anticipated a request for aid, presumably pecuniary, but her next words, after a courteous "What can I do for you?" from himself, dissipated that idea.

"Simply this," she rejoined. "Change your hotel. For various reasons you are not safe here. The Cliff House on the southernmost headland of Port Lobos would suit you in every way. Will you go?"

"But my dear Mrs,—Miss——"

"Dupont, Mrs. Dupont."

"Thanks! My dear Mrs. Dupont, why should I? I'm very comfortable here."

"Have I not told you, you are not safe here."

"It is very good of you, I am sure, to interest yourself in me in this way; but will you not kindly be more explicit?"

"No! if you disregard my advice, evil will happen."

"Well suppose I agree to follow it, what then? Shall I afterwards have the reading of the riddle?"

"Perhaps," she answered, very sadly. "Perhaps. You will go, and at once?"

"Oh, yes! since I am to do it, I may as well do it without delay."

"You will not regret it, and I am grateful."

"But why should you be grateful for a simple action on my part, that solely concerns myself. Mrs. Dupont, you are an Enigma!"

"By and bye you will see. 'Till then, adieu; and remember, you will hear from and see me again; adieu!"

"Well, that is a consolation, at any rate," said he to himself as he watched her retreating figure. "Yet what an ass I am to be led by the nose by the first pretty woman I meet upon the shores of the Great Republic. However, there's a spice and promise of adventure in it, and—by jove!—I'll see it through!"

A few moments, a passing over of sundry dollars, with extra for breach of contract, and Mr. Henry Babbington Clough is on his way to the Cliff House, at the Golden Gate.

In the guest's parlour at that establishment is our friend James E. Bloodgood, otherwise Colonel Troilus, P. Sajax U. S. A.; otherwise Left Handed Jim, pacing uneasily up and down, and ever and again casting an eager glance out of a window along the sandy road leading up to the hotel. Tired of this exercise, he strolls into the adjoining bar, and orders a "cocktail."

Before, however, he can be served he is accosted by a stranger, who asks him the whereabouts of the "Office," that place in this house off the main hall.

A brief explanation, and the acceptance on the stranger's part of the pilotage to the spot, lead to a general interchange of the usual human gossip and so on,

What followed may shortly be told.

The new guest settled, supper over, and cigars, with their accompaniments, well under way in the verandah, the New York "crook" proceeded to cast his fly. He was in no doubt as to the indentification of the "fish," for the signs to his expert eye, were unmistakable.

"Yes, sir," he said, in his assumed character of a United State Army Officer, "the most extraordinary circumstance you or I ever heard of!"

"Indeed," politely remarked Clough, "and what might this extraordinary circumstance be?"

"Just this, sir. A friend of mine, I may say a par-

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ticular friend, Cyrus Lello of New York, a civil and mining engineer, and well-known in scientific circles, has, he tells me, reliable information from an Indian resident at Colomo, sixty miles east of Sacramento City, of the certain existence of a valuable 'cache,' consisting of an unknown number of 'bricks' of gold, buried there by the latter's grandfather, the then proprietor of the land, more than seventy years ago."

"Well, why doesn't he dig them up?"

"Simply because he's poor, und unable to prospect the plot for the actual hiding-place of the 'find.'"

"I see, he's looking for a capitalist. Well, this Mr. Lello, this friend of yours in New York. Surely he could help him in that way, couldn't he?"

"Lello's only a struggling man. But Lello apart, that's not the whole gist of the matter. This Indian has, it seems, already unearthed two of the bricks, each, (for I've seen them) apparently about 500 ounces, and he's willing to sell these to any one who would be disposed to embark a few thousand dollars in the speculation; he, himself, putting the aforesaid purchase money into the venture."

To say that the Englishman was completely persuaded would be untrue; but he was so far satisfied that he invited his new acquaintance to furnish further details.

Nothing loth, the other forthwith proceeded to enlarge (with sundry highly-coloured embellishments) upon the superlative advantages of the enterprise.

Clough listened, and, in spite of a vague, fought-off feeling of distrust, was impressed.

A distinct and definite offer on the part of the "Colonel," as accredited agent for the "poor Indian," and an acceptance by Harry, conditional upon a satisfactory assay of the precious "bricks," and it was finally agreed that they should leave early the next morning, by the cars, for Sacramento City, the completion of the journey to Coloma, to be made in the six-horse stage of those parts.

Apparently sure now of his quarry, Bloodgood went to his room.

Harry Clough, however, had no inclination to sleepiness, and so lighting a fresh cigar, he strolled out through the entrance way on to the broad plateau facing the glorious sea-front of the "Golden Gate."

Directly he had passed the door he fancied he could see a dark form lurking in the shadow of the acanthus bushes.

Who, or what it was, he could not determine.

He had stood, maybe, ten minutes, gazing delightfully upon the moonlit sea, that swept with ceaseless, white-topped playfulness, round and about the famous sea-lions in the bay; when he was startled by a slight tap upon the shoulder.

"Is it not beautiful?" said a now not unfamiliar voice at his elbow.

"Beautiful indeed!" he replied, at a loss to account for this strange re-appearing of the interesting Mrs. Dupont at such a time and place.

"I hope," she said again, "that you are satisfied with the change?"

"Oh! yes, absolutely so, and, strange to say, I have tumbled into a good thing, or, at least, that which promises to be a good thing, through following your advice."

"Yes!"

Then he told her of the "golden-brick" expedition of the morrow. Exactly why he was so communicative he didn't know. Probably, like many another man before and since, he couldn't help the confiding in a pretty woman. Anyway, all that was in his mind on the subject, he told her, save and except with regard to the suspicious shadow. That he instinctively kept back out of sheer self-defence for his own lack of thoroughness and faith.

Leaping into the air, the Chinaman fell dead.

Cecille did not appear (so he thought) to show much interest in the affair, beyond just saying that she trusted it would all result in his expectation being fully realised.

"What time did you say," she asked him, with admirably simulated indifference, "is it that you start for Coloma to-morrow?"

"About six, and that reminds me that I must turn in if I am to have any rest at all."

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"Ah! yes, of course! Pardon me for keeping you here talking when you have so long a journey before you!"

"Not at all! But will you not allow me first to escort you to your home?"

"No thanks! I will go alone. I do not fear molestation." And slightly parting the folds of her "sarepe," she just allowed the glint of a tiny damascened-steel dagger to be momentarily visible.

Harry could only incline his head in courteous acquiescence, then, bidding his companion "Good-night," he turned and strode rapidly away in the direction of the "Cliff House."

Cecille looked after his retreating figure thoughtfully, and silently, for a moment or two.

"Yes," she then muttered to herself, "I, too, must be going—must be about my work! Hard!—hard!—and yet it must be done—it must be done!"

* * * * *

They had left the stage, and were, so the "Colonel" said, within a mile or less of the "half-breed's" ranche.

The Englishman was struck with the appalling desolation of the scene. Despair and ruin marked every step of the way.

In the sides of the banks and mounds of earth, but scantily covered with a sickly vegetation, were scooped hollows, for all the world like to a vast series of deserted rabbit-warrens. Deep ditches, once used as water-channels for gold washing, were now dry, their sides and beds cracked and blistered by the intense heat.

Buildings there were, indeed, but dismantled, squalid, ruinous. Weather-boarded huts, with, here and there, some token which told of a former store, a post-office, or a bank. Habitations certainly, though decayed, but of their tenants, no living sign.

They had now passed into a gorge, the tops of whose sides, well-nigh perpendicularly steep, must have reached upward at least seven hundred feet, when Clough's companion said, pointing towards a miserable-looking low log hut, a hundred yards or so in advance of them:

"Yonder's the place, and that's old Pablo at his door, I take it."

Whether it were that the New-Yorker's thoughts were so set upon his scheme, or whether that he was fearful by any suspicious act of creating a doubt in the mind of his prospective "catch," it is hard to say, but certain it is that neither he nor Clough were in anyway aware of a small party of three (two men and a woman), who had patiently and successfully shadowed them all along the route from Sacrament City.

The well simulated surprise of Pablo at his visitor's advent was only equalled by the pseudo-ingenious introduction of the Englishman by the "Colonel."

Out from the dark recesses of his wretched abode, through the murky atmosphere of which might have been intermittently detected the villainous countenance of the chinaman, Ah-Su, the half breed brought for inspection one of the golden "bricks."

Superficially, it certainly appeared to deserve its character.

There was that curiously "precious" colour-look about it which is associated in men's minds with the outward semblance of the "idol of Ophir." It seemed all right, and the Englishman began to think that the "deal" was genuine.

"Well," said he to the colonel, "I hold to my bargain. Let both 'bricks' be conveyed to Sacramento or to San Francisco, which even our dusky friend prefers, and upon a satisfactory assay I will pay over to him the stipulated amount namely $1.800 for each brick."

A short whispered conversation here took place between Left Handed Jim and Pablo, the latter, by his energetic and vehement gestures and exclamations seeming disinclined to accede to the proposed terms.

"Look here 'Colonel,'" interrupted Clough, "tell him he must decide one way or the other within five minutes, or we shall lose the return stage at Rattlesnake Bar."

"He says he will only hand the 'bricks' over for prompt cash," said the crook, after a whispered word with Pablo, "I should advise an immediate purchase, as the profit is considerable."

"How do you know that?" quickly flashed out Clough. "Well, I've changed my mind, I won't deal. I'm going at once to Rattlesnake Bar; as for you, you can study your own convenience."

While he had been speaking, the Chinaman had crept stealthily out of the hut, (the sun was setting, and gloom was settling down upon everything,) passed round behind the little group in front of the dwelling, and, swinging in his hand a prepared lasso, was soon within "throwing" distance of the Englishman.

As the latter turned to walk away up the "Gulch," the Celestial made his cast, but his victim being on the move, he missed his aim, the rope falling harmlessly to the ground.

Almost at the same moment a report rang out, echoing along the rocky sides of the ravine.

Leaping full three feet into the air, the Chinaman, Ah-Su fell dead in his tracks.

Then a second shot was fired, followed by a woman's shriek.

Clough could just distinguish the form of the "Colonel," standing at bay against the side of the hut, a smoking revolver in his hand.

A few feet from him lay a woman.

Stooping down, Clough recognised her; it was the woman of the letters.

Evidently seriously hurt, she was striving to raise herself on her elbow.

"Jim!—Jim!——" she said, so low that Clough could hardly hear her.

"Who is it you want?" he asked her, putting at the same time his arm under her head.

"Jim!—I'm sorry now I did it, but you forced me to do it. Jim! I can't see—I can't say—any—more—I'm——!"

Her head fell back with a jerk, and Left-Handed Jim's betrayer was gone to her account.

* * * * *

Pablo, the half-breed, had been secured by the detectives, Cecille's companions, before the last act of the tragedy. It was an easy matter afterwards to disarm the "Colonel," the two officers and Clough keeping guard over their two prisoners 'till the morning, when, marching them to Rattlesnake Bar, the stage carried the whole party to Sacramento.

Before leaving they laid poor Cecille in a grave upon the spot where she died.

Her murderer and his accomplice ultimately paid the penalty of their attempted fraud, and actual bloodshedding with twenty years States' Prison apiece.

* * * * *

The "bricks" upon examination were found, as was expected, to be nothing better than base metal, with a veneer, or casing of the genuine article.

Ralph Enderby.

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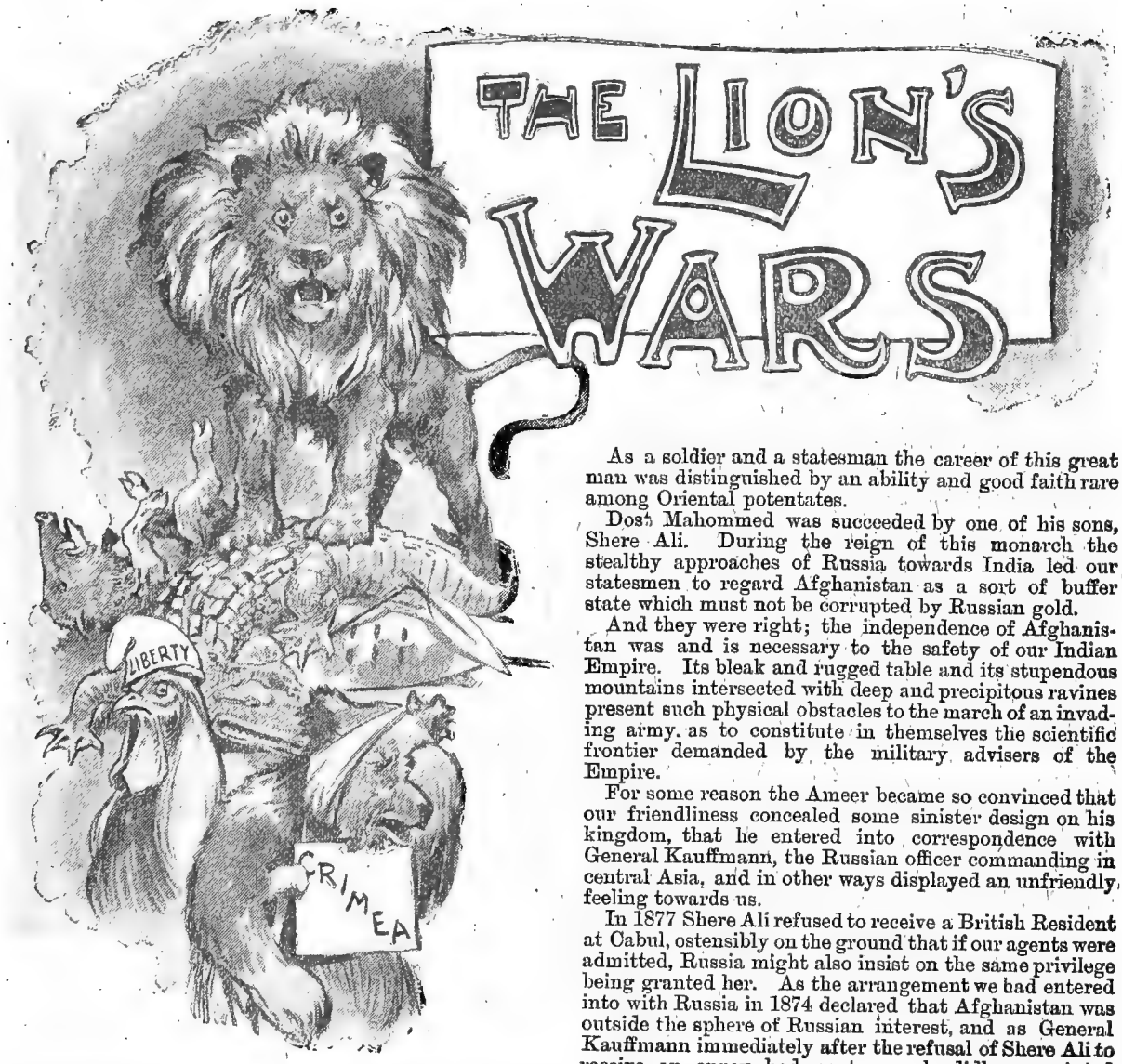

The Second and Third Afghan Wars. 1878-1880.

THE last Afghan War was brought about, it will be remembered, by the British Government espousing the cause of a dynasty so vile that the cruelty and vices of the Princes were too much even for the Afghans themselves.

Although Shah Soojah was one of the cruellest and most dissolute Princes who ever disgraced a throne, we encouraged him to raise an army to recover his lost dominions, and when this enterprise failed gave him a shelter in India and a stiffish pension. Fitness and strength in the East being qualities which ever rank before the nobler virtues, the throne of Afghanistan was taken possession of by Dost Mahommed, of the brave clan of Barukzai.

As a soldier and a statesman the career of this great man was distinguished by an ability and good faith rare among Oriental potentates.

Dost Mahommed was succeeded by one of his sons, Shere Ali. During the reign of this monarch the stealthy approaches of Russia towards India led our statesmen to regard Afghanistan as a sort of buffer state which must not be corrupted by Russian gold.

And they were right; the independence of Afghanistan was and is necessary to the safety of our Indian Empire. Its bleak and rugged table and its stupendous mountains intersected with deep and precipitous ravines present such physical obstacles to the march of an invading army as to constitute in themselves the scientific frontier demanded by the military advisers of the Empire.

For some reason the Ameer became so convinced that our friendliness concealed some sinister design on his kingdom, that he entered into correspondence with General Kauffmann, the Russian officer commanding in central Asia, and in other ways displayed an unfriendly feeling towards us.

In 1877 Shere Ali refused to receive a British Resident at Cabul, ostensibly on the ground that if our agents were admitted, Russia might also insist on the same privilege being granted her. As the arrangement we had entered into with Russia in 1874 declared that Afghanistan was outside the sphere of Russian interest, and as General Kauffmann immediately after the refusal of Shere Ali to receive an envoy had sent a splendidly appointed embassy into the country, it will be seen that the time had arrived for Calcutta to act with decision. Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, at once informed the Ameer that he also intended sending an embassy to Cabul, of which Sir Neville B. Chamberlain would be the head.

On September 21st, 1878, the mission—or, as the enemies of this country called it, the army—for it numbered 1,000 persons including 234 soldiers and twelve officers—left Peshawur, and, escorted by the Afridis, a freebooting clan, were conducted to the Afghan outposts. Here they stayed, sending on Major Lewis Cavagnari to Ali Musjid to arrange with the Ameer for the safe conduct of the embassy.

At that fort, which lies close to the dreaded Khyber Pass just within the Afghan frontier, Major Cavagnari and his embassy were confronted by an Afghan officer who threatened to attack the embassy if they did not at once retire.

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Not being strong enough to resent this insult, Sir Neville Chamberlain had no alternative but to return.

An apology was at once demanded of the Ameer for this outrage, with an intimation that it must be accompanied by a written undertaking to receive a British Resident at Cabul.

As no answer was received to what was really an ultimatum, war was declared.

Preparations for attacking the country at two points were instantly commenced, the destination of the one army being Candahar, the other Cabul. The hill-men having been prevailed on by lavish gifts of money to allow our troops to cross their country, Sir Samuel Browne, on November 21st, marched to Ali Musjid. Great confidence was reposed in the little army, perhaps because the soldiers were clothed in khaki, a colour which was then supposed to be invisible at 400 yards.

The Afghans fully believed their fort, although the materials were nothing but hardened mud faced with stone, to be impregnable, but the mountain guns and an elephant battery played sad havoc with the fortifications. The fort artillery silenced, and some yawning breaches made, the attack was delivered.

After rushing a couple of villages and bayoneting scores of Afghans found lurking in the scrub, the first line of defence was reached. The breastworks and intrenchments formed of rough boulders presented a most formidable appearance. The day was waning fast and the British general was debating the advisability of postponing the assault when the 27th Punjaubis, carried away by excitement, made a mad rush for the intrenchments. Had the light been good they might have succeeded, but in the gloom the brave Punjaubis could not see their way and were shot down like sheep by the well-posted foe.

Then the Fates conspired against them. General Browne before starting had sent a brigade under General Tytler to cut off the retreat of the garrison by way of Kala Kushta. The proximity of this column was conveyed to them at the very moment they were gloating over their slaughter of the Punjaubis. The dismay it created was so great that they at once bolted, greatly to the disgust of our men, who had looked forward to a busy day in the fortifications.

But the Afghans did not escape. The darkness which had helped them to repulse the Punjaubis played them a trick an hour or so later.

Accustomed as they were to the country, the darkness was so great that they entered the wrong pass, never discovering the mistake till they came face to face with Tytler's men. A desperate fight ensued, the Afghans offering a most stubborn resistance, but we worked our men round the fugitives and attacked them in the rear.

Thoroughly beaten, the garrison surrendered the prisoners, including General Cholam Hyder Khan, the Mir Akbur or Ameer's Master of the Horse, a bitter opponent of Britain and strongly suspected of being a paid emissary of Russia.

This victory greatly dismayed the Khyberese tribes, especially as our success prompted the Afridis to intercept the retreat of another band of Afghans, 500 strong. As their predatory instincts were even greater than their love of fighting, they gave them their liberty after stripping them of their arms, clothing, and camp equipage. But Shere Ali had even greater cause for uneasiness than the capture of Choder Hyder Khan.

The larger of the columns, known as the celebrated Kurram column, under the command of General Roberts, who since the days of the Mutiny had taken an active part in Indian warfare, had entered his dominions.

"Bobs is coming," ran like wildfire through the hills, and the bronzed cheeks of the Afghan soldiers paled. The Viceroy had proposed Moultan as a rendezvous for all troops attached to this column, but such dilatory tactics were so little to the taste of the fiery little general that he pushed forward regiment after regiment as it arrived.

Roberts being a name which inspired as much respect as fear, the native princes and chieftains were lavish in their offers of assistance. Transport cattle, elephants, stores, poured in, the Khan Khelet supplying 20,000 quarters of wheat at market price. Thoroughly alarmed, and acting on the advice of his Russian advisers, the Ameer issued 3,000 rifles to the Ghilzie and Kanaris tribes, besides offering them a large sum to oppose our advance.

As the Ghilzies alone numbered 20,000 hardy mountaineers their support was worth securing. Not that they could have stemmed General Roberts' advance, for the Kurran column consisted of 14,000 seasoned soldiers, exclusive of the contingent furnished by the native Princes.

Ali Musjid taken, and the Khyber opened up the frontier was crossed. On approaching Kapping fort the enemy fled. The country then became rugged and mountainous in the extreme.

It required a general of great capacity to steer his way through the gloomy gorges and passes of Afghanistan without loss, and Roberts succeeded because he was a great general. Afghans, hawk-eyed and grim, sat on the craggy peaks over-hanging some pass, prepared to rain a storm of lead on the advancing troops, and after waiting some hours would learn that the little man had gone a different route.

The hostility of the inhabitants greatly diminished as he advanced. The Asiatic cringe was noticeable five miles from Ali Musjid. At Lundi Khani the demeanour of the village head men partook of fawning. Encouraged by the signs of submission Major Cavagnari rode forward to Loi Dakka, where he was met by Mohammed Shah Khan of Lapura, and hitherto the Ameer's trusted ally. Cavagnari gave His Highness such a freezing reception that to escape the punishment he saw was coming he at once humbly submitted.

Still Cabul was not to be reached without fighting. On November 20th, Roberts' force entered a region of dwarf palm, scrub, and dry grass. That night the district was fired simultaneously in twenty places, our tents having a narrow escape.

Roberts was always good at forced marches. He made one that night, the men never halting till an open plain was reached.

After this, orders were given to reduce the camp following, and this was done so ruthlessly that one bell tent only was allowed for fifteen soldiers.

Kurram fort was then seized to safeguard our communication, and although the cold was intense and snow was falling fast, the Army, destitute as it was of baggage, was pushed forward to engage the enemy who could now be seen a few miles ahead. We overtook them at Peiwar village, but as the men were exhausted Roberts decided to attack the following day.

The Ameer's troops were found to occupy some upper hills for a distance of four miles, with guns at each end to resist Roberts' dreaded flanking attacks. The position was so strong that Roberts determined to give his men

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Drawn by] The Highlanders dashed for the second stockade. [C. Lawson Wood.

Google

another rest and carry it by a night attack. On the night of December 1st the troops marched out, and, crossing the deep ravine, began silently climbing the hills.

Although the native troops had been selected with the greatest care there were traitors in the camp. As we neared the enemy a couple of rifles were fired. Fortunately, the reports attracted no attention.

About 6 a.m. the weary soldiers reached the crest of the hill. Here all further passage was barred by ramparts of fallen trees 8ft. high. Then came a dozen shots. The Afghan pickets had spied our presence. Although taken by surprise they clung desperately to their position, till we got in amongst them. Then the clubbed rifles and bayonets of the British, and the long knives of the ferocious little Ghurkas, proved more than a match for the muskets and daggers of the tribesmen.

The first position carried, the Highlanders, between whom and the Ghurkas a friendly but strong rivalry existed, dashed for the second stockade.

After an obstinate resistance the foe were also driven from this stronghold. The first streaks of dawn were creeping into the newly-born day when the Afghans made their last effort, a charge down hill right into our ranks.

This was repelled with such force that the mountaineers retreated disheartened, fleeing across the plateau of the Spin Guard.

After having reached the summit of the Shutargardan, 1,150ft., and thoroughly explored the surrounding country, which was one of the objects of the expedition, General Roberts retraced his steps. Then both columns, by dint of hard fighting, in all of which the Afghans displayed the greatest courage, at last neared their respective destinations.

Shere Ali, now seeing that resistance was hopeless, took to flight. He was succeeded by his son, Yakoub Khan. Our prestige vindicated, peace was concluded at Gandamak, May 4th, 1879.

By this treaty we undertook to allow the new Ameer £60,000 a year, on condition that a British Resident was received at Cabul and certain cessions of territory granted to secure us a desirable frontier. Sir Louis Cavagnari, our representative, was well received by the Ameer, but it was not long before the populace of Cabul began to exhibit signs of unrest.

A couple of months later disputes became frequent between the native soldiery and the British escort. The authority of Yakoub, too, never very strong, now began to weaken and presently the roads about the Residency became infested with roving bands of disaffected ruffians, who made no secret of their intention to rid their country of the stranger. During July and August there was no actual outbreak, but the signs were ominous.

On September 3rd the Residency was attacked by a crowd of soldiers. During the whole of that day and through the night the tumult raged.

Failing after the most desperate fighting to force an entrance, lighted brands were hurled on the roof of the building, and soon the Residency was in flames.

Messengers were dispatched to the Ameer for assistance but none came.

When all hopes had vanished Sir Louis Cavagnari placed himself at the head of the survivors and made a desperate effort to break through the ranks of the mutineers. But the garrison had dwindled to a handful and were driven back.

The Resident fought with all the coolness of a trained soldier and slew half-a-dozen of the enemy with his own hand, but the odds were too great.

It was in the garden that he received the wound which cost him his life.

"Take me indoors," he whispered to the orderly; "don't let them touch my body."

The fire was raging overhead when the servant laid his master's body on the floor. For once the devouring element was merciful.

The roof crashed in, preserving the envoy's body from the last insult of a savage foe. On September 4th, all was quiet again in Cabul. The Residency was in ashes and all the embassy murdered. But they succeeded in killing 410 of the wretches and wounding over 1,500 before they succumbed.

When the news of what had happened reached India a cry for vengeance rang trumpet-like through the land.

How history repeats itself! In 1841 the Afghans murdered the stranger within their gates and an army of retribution was dispatched to avenge their death, and now a similar crime had to be avenged.

That grand soldier, Sir Donald Stewart, was placed in command of the army, which started for Afghanistan without a moment's delay. Deeply incensed, our men beat down all opposition with such stern ferocity that on December 24th, 1879, Sir Donald entered Cabul, another force capturing Kandahar. Whether Yakoub Khan was privy to the murder of the Resident was not and probably never will be known. The circumstances were suspicious and that was enough. He was dethroned and sent a prisoner to India.

But though British troops held Cabul and Kandahar, we were not masters of the country. Mohammed Khan, one of Yakoub's generals, collected a large number of fanatical warriors, and demanded the release of his sovereign. Receiving no reply he proclaimed Musa Khan, the young son of ex-Ameer Yakoub, and then sought out the British general and demanded that two British officers should be surrendered as hostages till Calcutta had either released Yakoub or recognised his son.

Sir Donald Stewart, not being a soldier of the Elphinstone class, sallied out of the city and, falling on Mohammed Khan's army, utterly defeated it.

Needless to say Russia was not idle in these troublous times. Seeing the throne vacant, she pushed forward a new claimant, Abdurrahman Khan, a grandson of Dost Mohammed and a man, for all his youth, of great ability and force of character.

To still further complicate matters, Ayoub Khan, a son of Shere Ali, who had long been the guest of the Shah of Persia, raised an army of Heratees and advanced against Kandahar, where we had established a certain Shere Ali Khan as an independent Wali. Three claimants to the throne, all hating each other but all united in their hostility of Britain.

The question presented no difficulties to us. It was simply which of the three claimants it was to our interest to support.

After much deliberation we selected Abdurrahman Khan for the simple reason that his chances of success seemed greatest.

It was true he had dealings with Russia, but Sir Lepel Griffin, the new representative at Cabul, was an able man, and would give the new Ameer to understand that our support was necessary to the retention of the throne.

At this juncture another terrible disaster befel our arms.

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General Burrows, an officer of no great experience, was sent by General Primrose, who commanded at Kandahar, with a force of 2,500 men, of whom only 500 were British, to oppose the advance of Ayoub Khan. The Afghan pretender was at the head of a force of 12,000 men with thirty-six guns.

The two armies met at Maiwand on July 27th and for a time the chances of success, owing to the steady courage of the British, seemed to be with us.

Suddenly some Bombay Sepoys who had never before been in action, were seized with a panic, and threw the whole army into a state of disorganization.

Burrows at once saw that the only way of escaping annihilation was a retreat on Kandahar.

Repeated charges soon transformed our little army into a rabble, and when the ammunition was gone, to a flying mob.

Then a fresh disaster occurred. The retreating army took the wrong road.

Fighting every inch of the way, the little force, famished with thirst, for they had been days without water, at last to their joy reached Ayandeh river.

From here Burrows pushed on to Kandahar, leaving the undaunted British to keep the enemy at bay till relief came. When General Brooke arrived to bring the survivors back, he found our fellows in the act of charging their foes with all the confidence of victorious troops. The battle of Maiwand counts, of course, as one of our Indian defeats; but it was not the fault of our men, they fought like lions.

Ayoub Khan, flushed with success, then laid siege to Kandahar, the fortifications of which had all fallen into ruin.

Sir Donald Stewart and his advisers were terribly perplexed when the news reached them. Were Kandahar to fall a blow would be struck at our prestige that would shake the Empire to its foundations. The calamity would be even greater were Ayoub Khan to beat off any force sent to relieve the besieged. The distance to be covered was over 318 miles, and so little was known of the country that the advance would have to be made with great caution.

Under any circumstances, the progress of the relieving force must be slow, for the transport necessary for an army of 10,000 men rendered speed impossible unless, of course, it were reduced to a minimum.

All eyes turned towards Roberts when this only possible way of saving Kandahar dawned on the Council of War. The lion-hearted little soldier's reply was simple but to the point. "Give me a few days to make ready and I will go."

On August 9th the dauntless general and his faithful followers left Cabul on a march of 318 miles through a mountainous country peopled by turbulent and warlike tribes. Sir Frederick Roberts had a sharp attack of fever but his iron will enabled him to keep it in subjection. Relentless as Fate the troops marched.

On, on, on, the journey seemed endless. "Would relief never come?" cried their beleaguered countrymen. Yes, it was close at hand.

Three weeks, only three weeks, and Roberts had reached Kandahar. It was evening when he arrived. Too late to fight, he gave his men a good night's rest and next morning fell like a thunderbolt on Ayoub Khan and crushed him. A grand achievement. The story of the march to Kandahar filled Europe with wonder and admiration. It stamped Lord Roberts as a great general, one of the greatest the world has ever known.

End of First Series.

Short Stories That . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 22nd. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. John Stokoe, of 9 Suffolk Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus *.

An eminent judge, who was said to be one of the most compassionate of men, once presided over a criminal court. His softness of heart, however, did not prevent him from doing his duty as a judge.

A man who had been convicted of stealing a small amount was brought into court for sentence. He looked very sad and hopeless, and the court was much moved by his contrite appearance.

"Have you ever been sentenced to imprisonment?" the judge asked.

"Never, never!" exclaimed the prisoner, bursting into tears.

"Don't cry, don't cry," said the judge, consolingly, "you're going to be now!"

---

* Jipkins had read a paragraph in which it said that if a man looked at his watch in the presence of others, some of the company were bound to do the same. He got into a tramcar one day in which there were only two men seated opposite to each other, and he thought he saw his way clear to win five shillings. He sat down by the side of one man, whose opposite neighbour wore a beautiful chain, which he fingered nervously at intervals.

"You see the gentleman sitting opposite?" whispered Jipkins to his neighbour.

"Yes."

"I can make him pull his watch out of his pocket and consult the time without saying a word to him."

"I don't think you can," said the other, smilingly.

"I'll bet you five shillings I do," said Jipkins.

"Done."

With much ostentation Jipkins pulled his watch from his pocket, and while he pretended to consult it, he kept his eyes fixed on his opposite neighbour; but that individual only twirled his chain and rubbed his nose, and then began to whistle softly.

"I think you have lost," whispered Jipkins' neighbour.

"Wait a minute," said Jipkins, "I'll try him again."

Again he tried him without the desired effect, when his neighbour said:

"You may as well pay. That man has just pawned his watch in order to pay me a bill he has owed me for six months."

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A chemist can never claim to be a great artist in his profession, for the majority of his works are of very bad taste.

"So you're going to be married at last?"
"Yes."
"And who is to be the best man at the wedding?"
"I am."

An old man would not believe that he could hear his wife talk a distance of five miles by telephone. His better half was in a shop several miles away, where there was a telephone, and the sceptic was also in a place where there was a similar instrument. On being told how to operate it he walked boldly up and shouted:
"Hello, Betty."
At that instant lightning struck the telephone wire, and knocked the man down, and as he scrambled to his feet, he excitedly cried:
"That's ar Betty, by gum, every inch."

Little Tommy had just left the house for school when he met the clergyman on his usual visit.
"Well, Tom, off to school? How are you getting on?"
"Fine, sir!"
"Do you know the seasons yet, Tom?"
"I think so. There are—are—are——"
"Tom, Tom! There's spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Didn't you know that? Now, what season is this?"
Tommy's face immediately cleared as he quickly replied:
"The football season, sir!"

Angelina had invited her young man to tea. Everything had passed off harmoniously until Angelina's seven-year-old brother broke the blissful silence by exclaiming:
"Oh, ma, you oughter seen Mr. Light the other night when he called to take Angie to the fancy dress ball; he looked so nice sittin' 'longside of her, with his arm——"
"Fred," screamed the maiden—whose face began to assume the colour of a well-done boiled lobster—quickly placing her hand over the boy's mouth.
"You oughter seen him," continued the persistent informant after gaining his breath, and the embarrassed girl's hand was removed, "he had his arm——"
"Freddie!" shouted the mother, as, in her frantic attempt to reach the boy's left ear, she upset the contents of the teapot in Mr. Light's lap, making numerous war maps over his new grey trousers, and causing him to emit a yell of agony as the boiling fluid coursed over his legs.
"I was just goin' to say," the frightened boy pleaded between a cry and an injured whine, "he had his arm——"
"You, James!" thundered the father, "get out of the room!"
And the boy made for the door, exclaiming, as he waltzed away:
"I was only goin' to say Mr. Light had his Army clothes on, and I'll leave it to him if he hadn't."
And the boy was permitted to return, and the remainder of the meal was spent in explanations from the family in regard to the number of times Freddie had to be "talked to" for using his finger as a spoon.

Count Jonah: "I was terribly put out at my hotel this morning."
Smart: "That so? They retained your luggage, I suppose?"

"No," sadly said the stranger at the restaurant, as he looked at the cup of coffee handed out to him, "you can take it back. I haven't the heart to attack anything so weak as that. It's against my principles."

Freddie: "I say, Charlie, there must be company in the parlour."
Charlie: "What makes you think so?"
Freddie: "Mamma just called papa 'my dear'!"

"Your husband has started a great many enterprises, I believe?"
"He has."
"How has he succeeded?"
"Failed in everything. But he has got hold of something now that will hold water, I think."
"Ah, indeed?"
"Yes; he has gone into the milk business."

"It's a very sad case about that big burglary at Simpson's house last night, isn't it?"
"Burglary at Simpson's? I hadn't heard of it? What did the burglars get?"
"A big haul of money. All the savings of the poor fellow for the past four years."
"You don't say so? Why did he have such a sum in the house?"
"He had given it to his wife to pay a dressmaking bill."

First Guest: "Hi! waiter, open that window, please. The room is suffocating."
Waiter: "Yessir." (Opens the window).
Second Guest: "Waiter, there's draught enough to kill one. Shut the window!"
Waiter: "Yessir." (Shuts the window).
First Guest: "Waiter, open that window again this minute!"
Waiter: "Very good, sir!" (Goes to the landlord). "One of the gentlemen wants the window open and the other wants it shut. What am I to do?"
Landlord: "Obey the gentleman who hasn't had dinner yet."

At a Sunday-school service a clergyman was explaining to a number of smart little urchins the necessity of Christian profession in order properly to enjoy the blessings of Providence in this world, and to make it apparent to the youthful mind, he said:
"For instance, I want to introduce water into my house. I turn it on. The pipes and faucets and every convenience are in good order, but I get no water. Can any of you tell me why I don't get any water?"
He expected the children to see that it was because he had not made connection with the main in the street. The boys looked perplexed. They could not see why the water should refuse to run into his premises after such faultless plumbing.
"Can no one tell me what I have neglected?" reiterated the good man, looking at the many wondering faces bowed down by the weight of the problem.
"I know," squeaked a little five-year-old. "You don't pay up!"

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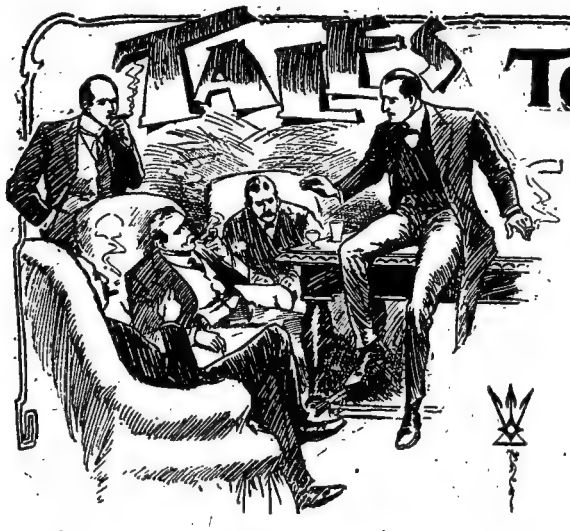

"Told off Duty."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Morse's Exclusive.

Told by the REPORTER.

YOUNG Devine, the alert reporter on the DAILY DAWN, seldom entered the club till quite late in the evening, and when he appeared some weeks ago there was a general call for a story. Here follows Devine's contribution.

It was never any affair of mine (he said) why the Hon. John Morse, third son of the Earl of Wyncott, became a junior reporter on the DAWN, but so it was; and the little envelope which the cashier handed him every Friday morning was apparently of much more importance to him than his prefix, as he promptly dropped the latter on becoming a newspaper man. We soon saw that the young aristocrat was not built for this kind of work. He was painstaking and reliable, but of journalistic "flair," or "nose for news," he had not a particle. He was generally popular among his colleagues, for the rest, though he never talked much, and was of a melancholy and sardonic cast of countenance.

Things were very quiet when he joined us. Every foreign potentate was in an aggravatingly robust state of health. Parliament was not sitting, the cables from South Africa were silent, so orders went forth that the event to be head-lined was the coming Dudingstone-Carr wedding, the Society sensation of the time.

The interesting feature of the affair consisted in the youth, beauty, and utter poverty of the bride. She was believed to be an orphan, though nobody knew definitely on that point, and it was generally recognised that her only fortune lay in her violet eyes, and spun-gold hair. She was very young, very vivacious, very charming. On the other hand Lord Dudingstone had been looked upon any time these twenty years as a confirmed bachelor, and the news that he was about to bestow his ancient title and enormous rent-roll

"Take particular notice of the big ruby. They say it's the biggest in the world."

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on the pretty, penniless unknown, was a trumpet-call to the gossips of Mayfair.

"Look here," said Lomax, the news editor of the Dawn, to Morse one fine morning. "I want you to do a nice third of a column on the Dudingstone-Carr wedding presents. They are on view now at this number in Brook Street, and I'm told that a more magnificent show has never been seen. Take particular notice of the big ruby from the Maharajah of Chillapore—they say it's the biggest in the world, and the native name means 'The Sea of Fire.' Why, what's the matter with you?"

We all noticed that Morse had turned deadly pale, but he muttered confusedly that it was "nothing," and we soon heard the rattle of his cab as he sped away to Brook Street.

"I have heard," remarked a man, "that Morse used to be engaged to the little Carr girl."

"Get out!" we shouted, all except Lomax.

"I've heard that, too," growled he, lighting a fresh cigar, "and I should like to get at the parts of the Morse-Carr mystery. Nobody knows who she is, while it's common knowledge that Morse is the son of the old Earl of Wyncott, broke to the world, and obliged to go into the newspaper business to get a living. Well, well, it's a rum show, this wicked old world of ours."

Just at that moment a startling thing happened. One of the subs burst into the room with a face of amazement.

"Heard the latest?" he shouted, "seen the casualties? Both Morse's elder brothers are dead of enteric at Pretoria, and he's heir to everything."

We stared at each other. This aristocratic recruit was certainly provocative of some amount of excitement among his colleagues.

"The old man can't last long, either," added Lomax, so interested that he had to take his cigar out of his mouth to say it.

"Dying by inches, they tell me," struck in somebody else. "Morse will be a belted earl before we know where we are! The income attached to the title is something like £150,000 a year."

Meanwhile, Morse was being rattled in a cab towards Brook Street, and we found out afterwards what happened there.

It was a fact that our new reporter and Phyllis Carr had loved, and parted. Both were penniless, and after a year of waiting there came one morning a wild, piteous letter to John Morse, inclosing a shabby little turquoise ring. It was the old story of "ma mither pressed me sair"—only in this case the mother was represented by an aunt with a large family of her own, who had sheltered the friendless orphan-girl since her parents' death. Morse suffered, but did not attempt to induce reconsideration of Phyllis' decision, and the light-hearted boy, known to his intimates as "Happy Jack," became the weary-eyed, grave man, whose gloomy face gave the young lions of the Dawn so many opportunities for ribald wit.

In Brook Street the costly gifts, whose number and value had induced a morning paper to devote a special article to them, lay displayed on various tables, the Maharajah's ruby blazing in the place of honour. One or two friends of the bridegroom were moving about the tables as Morse entered the room, and a tall, acidulated dowager had just exclaimed in an irritated tone: "Where's ours?" as her eye wandered over the glittering array. In the background a man dressed as a footman, most absurdly unlike a servant and most absurdly like nothing else but a detective, hovered unobtrusively.

A tall, bent man bowed to him from the doorway.

The reporter was making some notes when a slim figure in black, with a sweet, pale face, and a most woe-begone expression for a prospective bride, came in. Phyllis Carr's voice trembled ever so slightly as she spoke to him.

"If you will come into the drawing-room I will give you some tea, Jack," she remarked.

"Thank you," was Morse's equally brilliant reply. To the eyes of the acidulated dowager and her companions, the most commonplace incident in the world. Morse's hand shook as he took the cup from Phyllis. Idly they talked on indifferent subjects; Phyllis displayed a polite interest in newspaper work, and Jack was charmed to hear of various festivities in which the girl had been taking part. All the while the man's burning eyes

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devoured every detail of the future Lady Dudingstone's face. They were both playing with fire, and they knew it, and gradually there came little silences—glances and sighs took the place of words. Suddenly Jack sprang up.

"I mustn't stay, Phyl," he said, with a bitter smile. "Let's see, I haven't wished you happiness yet, have I?"

The girl flinched as if he had struck her.

"Don't be so cruel, Jack," she murmured, "if you only knew—"

"Stop! don't tell me," cried Morse, almost violently. "Don't you think I have enough to suffer already?"

"Am I not suffering, too?" burst out the girl, with a passionate gesture. "Oh, Jack, I am so unhappy. I can't marry him feeling as I do."

"In mercy—no more!" groaned poor Morse, putting out his hands. "I am only flesh and blood, and Heaven only knows what I shall say if I stop here!"

Blindly, with quivering lips and distorted face, he turned to go, but started back with an exclamation. A tall, bent man with iron-grey hair bowed to him from the doorway.

"Lord Dudingstone!"

The tall man turned to his *fiancée*, who had covered her face with her hands.

"Forgive me," he said, with a certain sad tenderness, "for any presumption in supposing that so much youth and loveliness would bestow itself on one so battered and world-weary as myself. I have never felt worthy, Miss Carr, of the honour which you once consented to do me, and after what I have heard and seen I feel that I can claim it no longer."

His voice broke a little here, but, quickly recovering himself, he went on:

"And I hope you will let a very sincere friend wish you long life and every happiness. Sir," he turned to Jack, "you have won and I have lost. I can only say that I am glad Miss Carr has chosen your father's son."

And hiding behind a mask of grave politeness his own broken grief and disappointment, the peer bowed and left them.

* * * * *

"Got anything?" said Lomax gruffly, as Morse entered the Dawn office, "about the robbery I mean?"

"What robbery?" asked Morse blankly.

"He says 'what robbery?'" groaned the news-editor, madly clutching his curly hair with both hands. "Great Scott, man, you have been to Broad Street this afternoon, I suppose? Well, you heard, of course, that an attempt was made to steal the 'Sea of Fire,' and the thieves caught red-handed. What have you got about it?"

"Nothing," said the reporter, boldly.

"Nothing!" shouted a voice in his ear. It was Carnegan, the editor-in-chief, a big, bull-necked man with an evil, small, grey eye. He was very flushed, and apparently very angry. "Nothing!" he repeated, in a sort of wail. "And you were there—there, on the spot! You ought to be sjamboked! Oh, you—you——"

Words failed him and he dashed to the door.

"Look here," he said, savagely, turning round, "we've had about enough of you on this paper. Why on earth did you take to the newspaper business while there were crossings to be swept? I wonder you aren't ashamed to draw your salary. You are no more a journalist than our cat. You needn't stop after to-day—see? Go and ask the cashier for a month's money. Bah!"

He ended with a snarl of contempt, and banged the door behind him.

"Well," said Morse, cheerfully, "that anticipates me by about five minutes. By-the-bye," turning to Lomax, "I've got an 'exclusive,' which might be useful."

The news-editor looked up in astonishment.

"Let's have it," he commanded.

"The Dudingstone-Carr wedding is off," replied the ex-reporter.

"Great Scott!" The news editor bounded in his chair. "Why, man, the frocks are made, date fixed, presents sent in—where did you get it?"

"From Lord Dudingstone himself."

"What, has he jilted her?"

"Not exactly," said Morse. "She's going to marry somebody else, as a matter of fact."

"Gee whizz! and who may that be?" asked Lomax, aflame with curiosity.

"Me," said the ex-reporter, blandly.

£100 REWARD!

The sum of One Hundred Pounds will be given by the Proprietors of Pearson's Weekly *to that person who, on or before Tuesday, April 23rd, first acquaints them with the name of the individual or individuals who killed James Trent and the manner in which he was killed.*

All attempts must be written on the form below, and in the fullest possible manner.

Envelopes should be marked "Trent" in the top left-hand corner, and should be addressed to the Editor, Pearson's Weekly, *Henrietta Street, London, W.C. The Editor's decision is final.*

I think ....

killed James Trent in the following manner ....

....

.....

Name..... .....

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Date.....

The actual way in which James Trent was killed is known only to the author of the story and to the Editor of *P. W.* The manuscript containing the description of the murder is locked up in the Editor's safe, and will not be sent to the printer's until after the Competition is closed.

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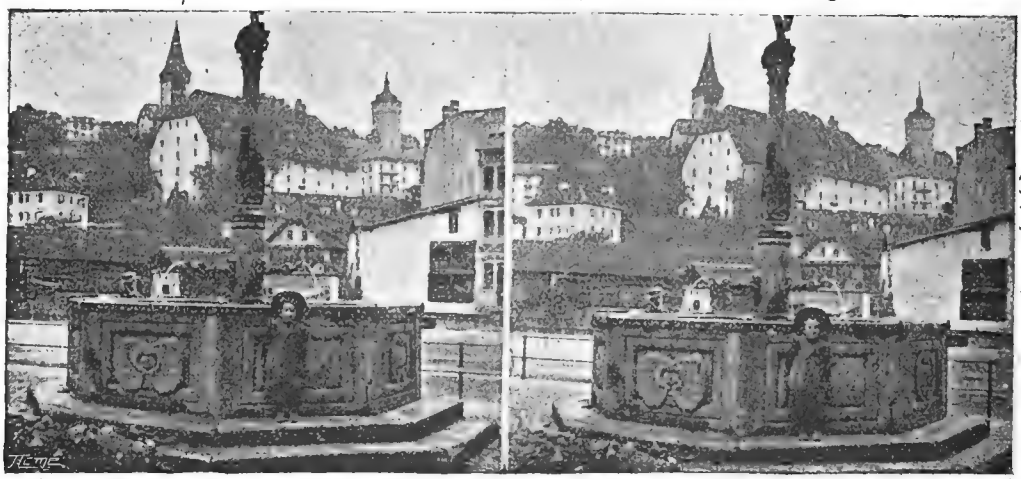
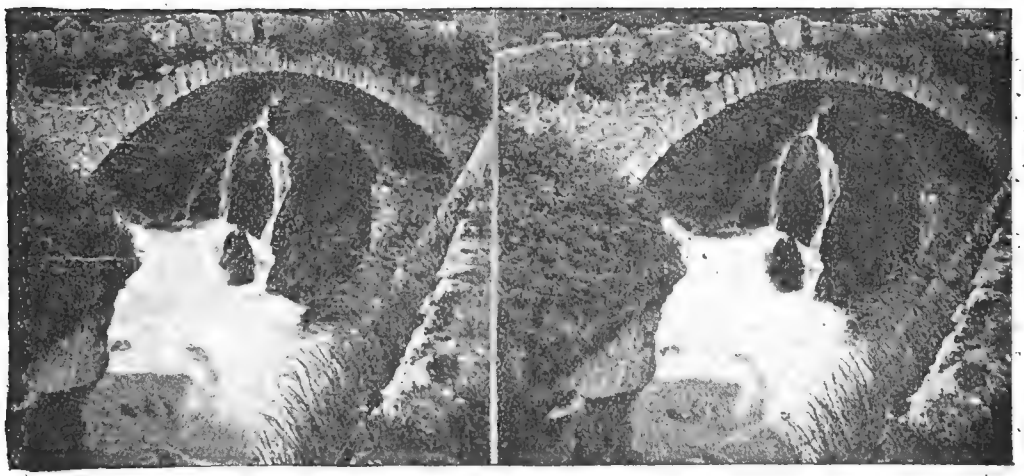
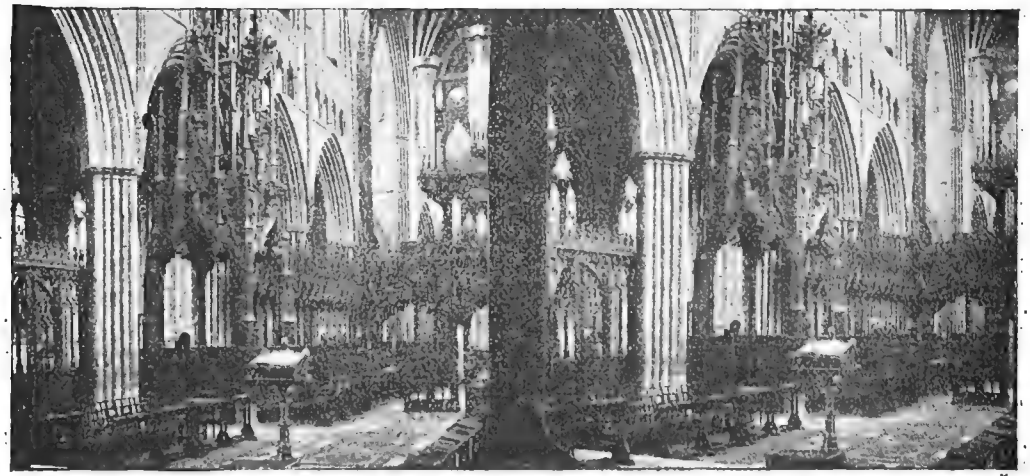
. Our Stereoscopic Gallery. .



At the Drinking Fountain.



A Scene in Switzerland.



Interior of a Cathedral.

To be cut out and looked at through a stereoscope, which can be supplied by *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 2s., post free.

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I KNEW that it was wrong when I did it, and if I hadn't known it at the time, I should soon have found it out from Maria, for she didn't forget to talk about it.

I put a little stress on "talk," just so that you should understand what I mean. Maria is a good wife, but—— Well, never mind; she isn't the only one who has that failing.

I was in the employ of a job-master in the suburbs and I had been sent with a closed carriage to take a lady and gentleman to some sort of a reception in town.

As it happened, they were not coming all the way back, I had to drop them at their daughter's on the way, where they intended to stay all night. So I was driving home empty, and taking my time about it, as the job was over before we had expected.

As I was trotting quietly along an almost deserted side street I was suddenly hailed, and, turning to find out who it was, I saw a young woman standing on the kerb of the opposite pavement with her hand raised to attract my attention. It was growing dark, but I could just distinguish enough of the features to notice that she was agitated.

I pulled up, fancying that there might be a chance of doing a little job on my own account. That's what I meant about knowing it was wrong; I ought not to have taken a mean advantage of my master's property to earn a few shillings privately, but that sort of thing is done occasionally and I don't profess to be any better than other men. She came across the road with a long stride that made me wonder whether she was a performer in a circus or something of that kind, and I expected her to tell me to drive to some theatre in town. I was reflecting whether I could do it or not when she reached me.

"You are empty," she said quickly. "I want you to drive me away from here as fast as you can." She opened the door while she was speaking.

"I'm a private conveyance," I objected rather lamely, "and I don't know that I can take you. Where do you want to go to?"

"Anywhere! My relatives are trying to get me put away in a mad house. I've just escaped and they are after me. Drive me anywhere so as to throw them off the track, and then you can drop me or take me to the railway station. I'll give you £5 if you'll drive me about for ten minutes to help me to escape these wretches."

She spoke just as fast as ever, gave a quick look towards both ends of the street, and then got into the carriage without waiting for me to answer.

"Jump in!" I said, but I don't believe she heard me, for she must have been inside by that time.

I noticed that she had a small bag with her, so I concluded that she had scraped a few things together and bolted.

Things are managed in a better way now-a-days, but at the time I'm speaking about, you could get a person into a mad house with very little trouble. I had read a good deal about those places, for I had been brought up for something better than carriage driving and was fairly well educated.

So you can understand that when I had a chance of helping a victim to escape from those who would have condemned her to such a fate, I was eager to do the job, even if I didn't get anything by it.

I touched my nag with the whip and off we went. As I turned the corner I heard a shout at the other end of the street and I also thought I heard hasty steps. I didn't dare to turn my head to see what was on; I guessed that it was the young lady's relatives in pursuit. I chuckled at the idea of them trying to overtake us on foot.

"I'll soon take her out of their reach!" I muttered, and I set the horse to a run.

But I was not to throw them off so easily. I passed a cab as I rattled through the next street and a suspicion crossed my mind about what would happen. I was right, for they hired that cab and came after me helter-skelter. My horse was in good condition and so was cabby's, judging by the way he stuck to me. But I was determined not to be done in my endeavour to secure justice for the oppressed, so away we went and we had a fine chase for about ten minutes.

I went down this street and through that, doubling and using all my skill in driving and all my knowledge of the district in order to throw them off. I went bolt

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across a main thoroughfare at the risk of a collision, making two carts pull up short and provoking a select specimen of bad language from the drivers, but I gained at least a minute by it, so I did not care. I wonder we were not stopped, but our pursuers did not raise a hue and cry, contenting themselves with chasing us in the hope of overtaking their quarry.

I got a good start of them in the end, and believed that I had lost them, so I pulled up a little and let the animal go easy. Suddenly my fare called out to me to stop, then opened the door and stepped out.

I nearly dropped the reins in surprise when I saw a young man, clean shaven and rather feminine in appearance, shutting the door behind him.

"Here are five pounds for you, Jarvey," he cried, holding out his hand with five sovereigns in it. I could just distinguish the coins, and the man's face was lighted up by the carriage lamp. "You drive on and let them follow you, while I take another road."

"And the young lady, sir?" I asked under the belief that he must have got into the carriage on the near side while I was talking to her on the off side. I couldn't explain it any other way.

"Oh, she's all right!" he replied with a laugh. "My get-up is pretty good, eh?"

And then he was off, and it dawned upon me that she must have had that suit ready to make the change, or was wearing it under her dress. But how did that agree with the story about the escape? Perhaps she had been wearing it under her dress all day, or for a day or two, waiting for a chance. I was puzzled, so I shook the reins and went on again.

But this stop had given the others a chance and they soon caught up with me, they could not have been so far off as I had thought.

Two men jumped from the cab at the risk of breaking their legs and a third sprang from the box as soon as cabby pulled up and caught hold of my bridle.

There was a rare hubbub and excitement for a few seconds.

An elderly gentleman yelled at me to move at my peril, and the other two shouted orders and threats until I hardly knew where I was. Then the elderly gentleman and the other man, one on each side of the carriage, opened the doors.

A dead silence followed, then the old gentleman carried on in a way that would have made Maria's hair stand on end.

That's what I tell her when she takes the old gentleman's part, as she always does, saying that it was only natural he should be annoyed and— But let us get back to the story.

He pulled out from the carriage a woman's dress and some false hair and held it up for me to see. I was astonished and annoyed as well, for I thought it rather mean of that young girl to give me away by leaving things behind her. It wasn't any use, after that, for me to say that they had been chasing the wrong carriage and that I didn't know anything about the matter.

"Where is your fare?" roared he.

"He's gone," I stammered out. "He got out just round there," unintentionally flourishing my whip vaguely in all directions, "and went off somewhere."

"Then we've been chasing him, instead of her," groaned the old gentleman. "I thought I was after my daughter. I'm glad to find that she is not the thief! It's a clever trick! But we'll have them both! If we are so close upon him, we shall find her. We'll go to the railway station and see if she is waiting for him there, oh, my misguided daughter!"

Then, turning to me, he shouted:

"You shall smart for this! You have been helping a robbery. Don't you know the difference between a man and a woman, stupid?"

"Seems to me, sir, that there's a pair of us. You thought you were running after your daughter, eh? Don't you know your daughter from a man?"

I won't try to repeat what he said. After blackguarding me, taking the name and address of my master in order to report me and nearly making himself ill with excitement, they drove off again, towards the railway station as I afterwards discovered.

You can easily understand that I didn't feel at all happy. I had earned five pounds in about fifteen minutes, but I should lose my place and character, even if I didn't get into trouble for aiding and abetting a thief.

From what the father had said, I judged that some fellow—my private fare—was running away with a girl, and that he was using his opportunity to rob the father. All my ardour in the cause of justice was misplaced. I had reaped the reward of wrong doing.

I found that I was not very far from the place where I had picked up my fare, which shows how I had doubled. I was a little farther from home, that's all, and it was towards home that I now turned.

Have you ever noticed how swiftly events follow each other at certain times in your life? You may go for a year without any startling experience, and then you will have a whole crowd of adventures in one day. It never rains but it pours—you know the old saying. That's how it seemed to be with me on the day I'm speaking about.

I decided not to go through the street where I had picked up my fare, but to go round by another way—rather a longer way round. I suppose it was fate.

I was thoroughly dejected and I remembered afterwards that I was just walking along close to the kerb. A figure suddenly emerged from a doorway and came swiftly towards the carriage, saying in a tone of relief:

"I'm so glad you've come. I wondered where you had gone."

I pulled up mechanically. She stood on the kerb, quite close to a gas lamp, and hesitated whether to open the door or not.

The voice, the countenance, and the general appearance of the girl told me that she was more of a child than a woman, although I judged her to be about eighteen.

There are girls like that; they have been brought up at home, under the strictest supervision of parents and governesses who have kept almost everything worldly from them, and they are eager to see this outside world and easily led by a stronger mind which takes advantage of their innocence.

I was certain that this was the kind of girl before me now, and then it crossed my mind that I had fallen in luck's way—that here was a chance to retrieve myself.

"Were you expecting anybody, miss?" I asked very politely. "I was told that I had to pick up a young lady just hereabouts."

"Yes, yes!" she replied eagerly. "Where is Harry—I mean, where is he?"

"He was obliged to go on first," I continued, artfully

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trying to draw her. I felt sure of my ground now. "He had to dodge them, you see, but he's all right now. He said you would tell me where to drive you."

She trembled so violently that I thought she was going to fall, so I jumped off the box and helped her inside.

"They didn't catch him? Was my father very angry? Oh, perhaps I had better not go!"

"Oh, yes, you had better go," I said re-assuringly. "It will be all right."

Poor child! I could see that she had been misled, charmed by the dashing manner of "Harry," who was a good-for-nothing and making use of her to get money by hook or by crook. I summed it all up in my own mind. I wanted her to tell me where she expected to meet him, because I thought that would put me on the track and I might be able to get hold of him and detain him.

They were to meet at Willesden, where they intended to take the train for a little place in Wales. Believing that I was acting under Harry instructions, she told me this unhesitatingly. I mounted to my seat and drove off at a good pace.

Arrived at Willesden, she looked about for a young man. I got someone to look after my horse while I looked about for him. Just as I was thinking that he had given us both the slip, I saw him striding along the platform.

I made my way to the same platform, but the girl had seen him and was running after him. A train was standing there ready to start, and I saw him deliberately thrust her aside with such force that she reeled against the seat and fell on it, bursting into a flood of tears. He placed his hand upon the door of the carriage nearest to him and opened it, but now there was another diversion.

Two men rushed along the platform, shouting to the guard not to start the train, and they were followed by an elderly gentleman who was panting for breath. I recognised them by their voices and appearances.

Then there was tremendous confusion. Harry left the carriage door and darted down the platform on to the lines, followed by the two men, while the old gentleman went up to his misguided daughter and clasped her in his arms. I stood close by them.

What I heard then and afterwards put me in possession of all the facts. This girl had been brought up as I had supposed. The young fellow had been one of a party of amateur minstrels engaged to give a performance in the old gentleman's house at Christmas time, the girl had been attracted by him and he had noticed it, so he had set to work to win her affections for the sole purpose of getting money somehow or other.

He had arranged to elope with her, and the foolish girl had been delighted with the "romance" of the thing. She had left the house in accordance with his plan, which was that he was to disguise himself in one of her dresses and with a suitable make-up and enter the house as she left it, so that he might carry her portmanteau, which was too heavy for her. She was to wait for him at a certain spot and he would come up in a carriage.

He seized the opportunity to rob the place and carry off some valuable articles of jewellery and some money. By good luck the plan was partly upset by a manservant who had suspected something, and the robbery was discovered in time for the father and two friends to start in pursuit of the robber.

He went to Willesden, as originally planned, probably because it was near at hand and he wanted to get away. I am inclined to think that he really intended to take the girl with him, but pushed her aside because he had discovered that his pursuers were close upon him and he wanted to get into the train and be off.

Did they catch him? Yes and no. The two men went after him in the darkness down the line. Hunters and hunted were so intent on what they were doing that they did not take due precaution. A train was coming in at a great rate, in the darkness they appear to have thought that it was on the other metals, and that mistake was fatal to Harry. When he realised his danger it was too late, and he was knocked out of shape. His pursuers, being some yards behind, had just time to get out of the way.

That was the tragic end of my private fare and the termination of my adventures for that day. I nearly lost my place over it, but the old gentleman considered that I had done what I could to make amends and he interceded for me so that my master decided to look over it.

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New Serial.—Start To-day.

THE FATE OF MICHAEL STANDRIDGE

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trogan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head. Knowing that Hoathley will make another attempt to secure the diamond, Standridge resolves to "blind the trail."

CHAPTER II. (*continued*).

"AND yet," thought Michael, "these games of his would be more easily understood supposing that by some means he has become acquainted with that old story. It doesn't follow that because I haven't told him, he hasn't heard it elsewhere. If he knows that I have a missing daughter somewhere, he must suspect that my first task will be to search for her when I reach England. That would account for his persistence and hurry to do the trick before I get on to the girl's trail. What is more, if he does know anything I shall have a job to shake him off when we land. He mustn't kill me, though, before I find Marion—and if I do find her, a nice legacy it will be to leave her Simon Hoathley's greed and hatred."

Michael's lamp had flickered to its socket, but the early June sunshine was pouring through the porthole now, and sounds of sweeping in the saloon showed that the stewards were up and about. Michael swung his long limbs over the side of the berth, and, reaching over for a coat that was hanging on the wall took from the pocket an almanac which he scanned diligently for some minutes, making several calculations on the cover with a stump of pencil.

"An hour after midnight the tide will be running out swiftly," he said to himself at last. "We should pass the Needles about that time, so I ought to be able to do it easy enough. I know every inch of that water so well, and I am as strong and hearty to-day as when I used to go duck shooting from Poole Harbour. It should be child's play in this calm warm weather."

His eyes ranged round the cabin, fastening first on the brand new trunk, which he had bought at Capetown to hold his scanty necessaries for the voyage, and then upon a few garments hanging on the rack. "There's nothing here of any value that I can't take with me," he thought. "I can easily get a refit for a pound or two at the first opportunity. Yes, I see no other way of shunting Mr. Hoathley, and it shall be done."

And then, after fastening round his waist a leathern pouch-belt, which he took from under his pillow, he dressed himself quickly and went on deck to enjoy the fresh morning air.

At the western entrance to the Solent, running out from the Hampshire coast to within a mile of the Isle of Wight, is a long spit of shingle, at the end of which Hurst Castle frowns grimly towards the Needles and the open sea. Through this narrow strait passes all the shipping bound to or from Southampton westward, and the state of the soundings is such that large vessels have to be navigated much nearer to Hurst Castle than to the Wight. At the end of this natural causeway there are, in addition to the fortifications, a couple of lighthouses and a Lloyd's signal station, whence the names of passing vessels are telegraphed to headquarters. The nature of the work done at this lonely telegraph office, whose threshold is rarely crossed by any but the operators, demands that it should be open night and day.

It was between one and two in the morning when the man on duty had his attention called, by the deep organ tone of a steam syren, to a passing vessel whose combination of red and green signal lights proclaimed her to be the *Trojan*, homeward bound from the Cape. At the rate she was steaming, she would be up at the docks in a little over an hour, and by the time the signalman had finished his despatch, she was well on her way in the last straight run for Southampton Water.

* * * * *

The signalman lit his pipe and set about brewing himself a cup of coffee on an oil stove. As the water began to boil, he heard the crunching sound of footsteps on the shingle outside, and a moment after the door of the office opened, and a man stood in the entrance, dripping from the crown of his uncovered head to his shoeless feet, coatless, and rather out of breath, but otherwise not much the worse for an evident struggle with the sea. The signalman was too astonished to be the first spokesman.

"Can you lend us a hat and coat, and a pair of boots, mate?" asked the stranger, as coolly as though he had walked into a second-hand clothes' shop at midday. "I've met with a bit of an accident, you see."

The signalman pulled himself together at the matter-of-fact tones of his visitor's voice.

"Come in," he said, with quick, rising sympathy. "Come in and make yourself comfortable. I daresay I can fix you up in dry things. How did it happen?"

"All through a wager, friend," said the stranger, "and it ought to be a warning to me, at my time of life, not to indulge in such antics. I hail from Boscombe, d'ye see, and I staked a ten-pound note that I'd row a shore-boat to Cowes and back in twenty hours. I fetched up at Cowes

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all right, and I was slipping homewards gaily with the tide, when I got into the wash from that big steamer that passed awhile ago. My boat capsized and sunk, and I had to swim for it—that's the whole story."

"Well, you take take it pretty calmly," said the operator as he rummaged his locker for dry clothes. "How will that suit you—and that, and these?" he added, tossing over various articles of attire, all too small for the burly frame of the waif from the sea. The stranger selected a coat and hat, and after a struggle, managed to cram his feet into an old pair of house slippers. He positively declined to change his shirt and trousers, excusing himself on the grounds of difference in size, and protesting that his own would dry on him in an hour or two.

"I'm tough, friend; I bean't come to harm," he said. "And now just two words with you before I go. First, you must let me pay for these things. I might forget to send them back."

He took five sovereigns from his trouser pocket, and laid them on the table, silencing the man's faint disclaimer with a wave of his hand.

"Secondly," he went on "keep this dark, will you, like a good fellow? I should be so confoundedly chaffed about it if my upset was put in the papers, or got round in any way, and I want to pitch my own yarn my own way—you understand."

"That will be all right," replied the signalman; "it's few we see to talk to at this outlandish place, and I shan't say anything. You will sit down and rest awhile, now, won't you?"

But the stranger would not be persuaded. He had no need of rest, he said. He would prefer to push on by the military road that led along the spit to the mainland, and thence to Milford, where he could take train. So, after drinking a cup of hot coffee, and with a hearty "good-bye," he departed from the office, and was seen in those parts no more. The signalman had little leisure for newspaper reading, and it is not likely that he ever saw the following paragraph, or that, if he did, he connected it with his midnight visitor. It appeared two days later, and ran thus:

"During the passage of the Union Line steamer *Trojan* up Channel, one of the saloon passengers is supposed to have fallen overboard, and to have been drowned. He was not seen after the ship had entered the English Channel about five in the afternoon, and he was nowhere to be found when the vessel was docked at Southampton. The unfortunate gentleman's name was Standridge, and it is understood that he had been a successful miner at the diamond fields."

As Michael sat waiting at the little wayside station at Milford in the early summer morning, an object of wonder in his ill-fitting clothes to the solitary porter, he chuckled pleasantly to himself: "I've blinded the trail, Simon; I've blinded the trail."

When it is picked up again, God help you, Michael Standridge!

CHAPTER III.

A Good Bargain.

On the ground floor of one of the dingiest of the dingy houses in Hatton Garden are the business premises of Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, diamond brokers and dealers in precious stones.

After entering frem the street, a door on the right of the passage takes you into the front room, better known as the clerk's office, and through which it is necessary to pass in order to reach the partners' private sanctum in the rear.

In the front room a young man was sitting on a high stool before a desk. His back was covered with a well-fitting coat, and he had very shiny, straight black hair, cut short; but for the moment his features were invisible, because of the nature of his present occupation.

The flap of the desk, upon which lay a heavy ledger, was open to an angle of forty-five degrees, and was supported in this position by his head and shoulders, which were, therefore, to all intents and purposes, inside the desk. This was Mr. Swinley Tasker, sole clerk and general factotum of the house of Strauss and Lightfoot, whose business transactions being considerable in amount rather than in numbers made it unnecessary for them to geep a costly staff.

It was ten o'clock on a bright morning in early summer, and the air which came through the open window was instinct with the sounds of life. The Hatton Garden sparrows were twittering to their rivals away in Ely Place, and the Ely Place sparrows were gossipping loudly back. Knowing birds, these last, and wise in their generation; for have they not access to Sir George Lewis' window sill?

And, besides the sparrows, there were the ordinary street noises—the roll of heavy vans, the tinkling crash of a piano organ at the public house round the corner, and the strange cries of office boys on errands bent—all increased at this of the day by the tramp of portly Dutch merchants coming to business, and by the rattle of hansoms bringing those who were lazy or in a hurry. So it was that, what with all this busy hum and the absorbing claims of his occupation, Mr. Tasker failed to catch the sound of a well-known footstep in the passage, and that it was not till the door handle was turned that he became aware of an arrival. At this point the angular arrangement of the desk-flap justified its utility. Mr. Tasker's head and shoulders were swiftly withdrawn, and the flap, with its superincumbent ledger, was deftly lowered to its accustomed place, the little transformation scene having the effect of presenting to Mr. Light-

"I'm considered a judge of stones, if you have anything pretty to show us," insinuated Tasker.

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foot as he entered the welcome sight of a studious clerk bending over his work.

"Good morning, Tasker," said the junior partner, as he passed through to his room behind. "Hard at it, I see. Come in, please, and see if there's anything in the letters this morning requiring your attention. Mr. Strauss does not return from Amsterdam till to-morrow."

The clerk swung himself off the stool and followed his employer into the private office. When he first looked up at Mr. Lightfoot's pleasant greeting, his face wore a responsive smile, which, however, faded quickly, as soon as the other's back was turned, into a look of abstraction almost amounting to boredom or weariness.

Mr. Swinley Tasker had regular features and a swarthy complexion, with no particularly dominating expression by reason of the variety of changes which asserted themselves in his countenance. He seemed to have an expression ready at command to meet the requirements of the occasion and the mood of those he found himself with. If he was talking to a sad man that man's sadness was not half so sad as the gloom reflected in Swinley Tasker's melancholy eyes. If he was confronted by a jovial soul that man's joviality would be met at once and outshone by the beaming gaiety of Swinley Tasker's smile.

Thus it was that the diamond broker's clerk was a favourite, and accredited with a sympathetic nature—in certain circles which he affected.

Mr. Lightfoot deposited his bag and umbrella, and seating himself at the table, began to open the day's correspondence.

The two first letters he retained after perusal for his own attention, Tasker standing at his side the while, note-book in hand ready to take down any replies that might be wanted.

The third letter required such treatment, and Mr. Lightfoot gave his clerk the word to write from dictation. Glancing up to see if everything was in readiness, the diamond broker obtained, for the first time that morning, a full view of his clerk's face.

"Why, Tasker," he said kindly, "you don't look well to-day. What have you been doing to yourself?"

The young man certainly looked "seedy." His expression was all there—the proper business expression of respectful alacrity and eager attention—but the best controlled facial muscles cannot hide dark circles and pallid lips. There was a suspicion of shakiness, too, in the well-kept fingers that held the waiting pencil, and a blueness of chin which bespoke an omission to shave.

"I don't feel quite the thing this morning," he replied. "There was a very late meeting of the Y.M.C.A. at Exeter Hall last night, and after that I was at the bedside of a dying cabman. The poor fellow sadly needed consolation and advice. I got very little sleep in consequence; but I am quite able to attend to my duties. You know, sir, I never allow myself to be incapacitated for work even by—by the good cause."

"I shouldn't burn the candle at both ends, though, if I were you, Tasker," said the diamond broker. "A good cause, no matter what it may be, becomes a bad one when it makes a man look as chippy as you do this morning."

Mr. Lightfoot's approval of Exeter Hall, of its frequenters, and of its kindred enterprises, was well known, and this was the first time he had ever spoken so coldly about a "good cause"—the phrase was originally his own—which he had so much at heart. Till now he had almost seemed pleased to listen to accounts of his clerk's evening occupations in this direction. "Do I look so bad as all that, or is the governor going to backslide?" Tasker wondered to himself as he proceeded to take down the letter.

Other correspondence was dealt with, and the last letter in the pile was reached. Mr. Lightfoot scrutinised the envelope with the curiosity of a man who sees unfamiliar handwriting for the first time, and then broke the seal. The letter contained a few lines only, but from the first his interest was roused, and evidently increased line by line till he came to the signature.

As he read he shifted his chair, so that the clerk could not see over his shoulder; and when he had finished, he

It was a gem of great size, and even in its present rough condition, blazed with the true sparkle of its species.

tossed the envelope into the waste paper basket, but carefully folded the letter and placed it in his pocket-book. The only hint he let fall as to the nature of the communication, was to say that he expected a gentleman—a Mr. Thomas Wilson—to call on important business at twelve o'clock. Mr. Wilson was to be shown at once into the private room.

The clerk retired to the outer office to write the replies, and a few minutes later Mr. Lightfoot went out to keep an appointment, leaving word as he passed out that he would be back before twelve. Mr. Tasker wrote steadily for half an hour, and then, sticking his pen in the inkpot ready for emergencies, gently lifted the flap to its old angle, and buried his head once more in the desk. There was a newspaper spread out inside the desk, upon which he made frequent ticks with a stump of pencil, varying the performance by scrawling sundry figures on a scrap of paper. The vans and the street boys and the sparrows made more noise than ever, and so intent had the young man become on his occupation that this time the opening of the door failed to

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rouse him, and it was not till the sound of breathing close by caught his ear that he knew that he was not alone. The desk flap was lowered in a hurry, and Tasker turned to find a stranger standing at his elbow.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" said the clerk. "You startled me—coming in like that," he added, with a touch of protest in his tone.

"I beg your pardon," explained the other. "You took no notice when I spoke. I thought that thing had fallen on your head and stunned you. Are you one of the firm? My name is Wilson—Mr. Thomas Wilson—and I am expected, I think."

"No, sir, I am not one of the partners; but Mr. Lightfoot will be here by twelve o'clock to see you as arranged," replied Tasker, who had recovered himself now, and was searching Mr. Thomas Wilson's face for some clue to his character and business. Swinley Tasker didn't like secrets that were kept from him by his employers, and the letter which the junior partner had pocketed was piquing his curiosity. But the firm's new client showed no disposition to enlighten him.

"I reckon I'll sit down, then, till the boss comes in," he said, suiting the action to the word. "I'm a trifle before my time, I see."

"I'm considered a judge of stones, if you have anything pretty to show us," insinuated Tasker, twisting round on his stool, and adopting his confidential and trusted-adviser expression.

"Thank ye, friend, I've nothing worth so much as your valuable time," replied the stranger, with a Sphinx-like glance at the young man's desk. "Don't let me be hindering you."

Tasker, who never resented a snub in business hours, turned to his desk again, devoting himself now to the letters upon it—not to the newspaper inside. The visitor, a large man of rugged features and somewhat colonial appearance, sat and watched him with an air of contemptuous amusement, now that his back was turned.

"Boss nearly due by the way the beggar works," Mr. Wilson thought to himself. "I wonder if they know of his little weakness. Not quite the thing in a shop where precious gems are dealt in—but there, it is no business of mine."

In a few minutes the junior partner came hurrying into the office, and on being informed by Tasker of the stranger's name, at once led Mr. Wilson into the private room.

"I am very glad that you have come to us," he said, when he had carefully closed the double doors. "I have a commission for just such a stone as yours must be, if it is true to the description in the South African journals. But, pardon me—if I remember rightly, the name of the fortunate finder was given as Standridge. I presume you have purchased the stone from that gentleman, for it is only yesterday I was reading of his having been drowned in the channel."

"Quite right of you, sir, to want to satisfy yourself that the 'Elephant' was honestly come by," replied the new client, with approval. "It confirms the good character I had of you from several old friends at Kimberley. They told me that your firm was the fairest dealing in the trade, and square and reliable all round. That is why I sought you out the moment I reached London, and your putting that question just now shows that I can safely trust you with a secret—an honourable secret. I am Michael Standridge."

And Michael—for he it was—proceeded to relate the circumstances of his disappearance from the *Trojan*, and the reasons which prompted him to take the unheard-of course of swimming ashore before the vessel reached port.

He omitted from his narrative all reference to his family history, and did not say that the man whose suspicious persistence he wished to evade was a relation; but he pro-

(*Continued on page 508.*)

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duced documentary evidence, soiled and stained with sea water, that clearly established his own identity.

The broker listened with the deepest interest, and concurred in the desirability of giving such an unpleasant companion the slip. He promised to preserve the strictest silence as to Michael's real personality, and pointed out that there would be no fear of the "Kimberley Elephant" being recognised, for, if the firm purchased it, it would be at once taken abroad to be cut and polished.

"Have you the stone with you?" he concluded, with natural eagerness.

Michael unslung his leathern belt, and, taking the "Elephant" from its pouch, placed it in Mr. Lightfoot's hand. It was a gem of great size, and, even in its present rough condition, blazed with the true sparkle of its species. Having weighed the diamond very carefully, and put it to the usual tests, the broker looked up at Michael and offered him twenty thousand pounds for it.

"That's about the market value, I imagine," said Standdridge; "it's yours at that figure."

Mr. Lightfoot took out his cheque-book, and wrote out a draft for the amount without more ado. "I am making this payable to Thomas Wilson," he said. "Shall I cross it upon any particular bank?"

"Yes," returned Michael, after a moment's thought; "make it Metropolitan and Counties, Reading, please. And you might note to address me there, care of the bank, in case you ever want to communicate with me. It is likely I may settle in the neighbourhood for a time."

The main business being thus settled, Michael produced some smaller diamonds which he also wished to dispose of. These were eventually bought for £380, and Michael expressed a wish that payment should be made in cash, so that he could have a supply of ready money to be going on with. To this the broker readily assented.

"I fear, though," he added, "that I must trouble you to call in a little later, as I shall have to send to the bank for the money. I shall not be here myself, as I have an important engagement, but if you will look in at three o'clock my clerk will hand you bank notes to the amount."

Michael promised to call at the appointed hour, and got up to take his leave. Mr. Lightfoot rose also to accompany his client to the street door, and as they passed through the outer office, where the clerk was busier than ever, the broker paused for a moment to say, "Before I forget it, Tasker, just make a note of Mr. Wilson's address—'care of Metropolitan and Counties, Reading.' I shall want you presently, by the way, to go to the bank for some notes, which you will hand to Mr. Wilson when he calls at three o'clock." Then the two men parted very cordially, for the bargain had been satisfactory to both of them, and no impression had been left on either side of undue advantage taken or received.

It was now past one, and Michael walked about the streets till he found a quiet restaurant, where he passed the interval of waiting over a simple meal, and in meditating on his plans for the future. The old idea still clung to him, that his erring wife might sooner or later have made her way back to her native place, and he meant to make that district his headquarters, at any rate for the present. His daughter, he reckoned, must be two or three and twenty years old by now, and if she was alive he meant to find her, now that he had resources at his command.

As to his wife, he seldom thought of her, and when he did it was as of one dead to him, and whom he never wished or expected to see again. All his affection had been transferred long ago to the little girl who had played at his knee in the old Dorsetshire cottage, and the haunting dread ever present in his mind was that "something would happen" to him before he could find her.

He took out the cheque he had received for the big diamond, and pored over it thoughtfully.

"What I have to do with all this cash," he said to himself, "is to put the bulk of it away so that Simon can neither steal it nor obtain it by fraud in the event of my death. The slippery devil may hit on my track again any day, and there is no end to his scheming. If it were lying in a bank I should never feel sure he wouldn't upset any will I might make, and get hold of the stuff as next of kin. The best that can happen to the cash is to disappear. I would rather it lay idle for ever than let Simon stand a chance of benefitting by it."

So he sat and pondered till it was time to go back to Hatton Garden to receive the balance due to him. When he entered the offices of Strauss and Lightfoot he was, evidentally expected. Mr. Tasker was fingering a little pile of notes which lay before him on the desk. Wearing his most courteous and deferential expression, the clerk at once invited "Mr. Wilson" to come forward and write a receipt for the amount.

"I thought you would like it in small notes, sir," he said as Michael laid down the pen, "I have got fifteen twenties, three tens, and ten fives," and he proceeded to count the notes after the manner of bank clerks, keeping his left hand on the corner of the pile and turning up the corner of each note in succession with the forefinger of his right hand. He performed the operation with ostentatious slowness, as though he desired to save Michael the trouble of accounting the notes himself by letting him see that the mount was correct.

"That's it, then, sir," he concluded; "fifteen twenties are three hundred, and three tens are three thirty, and ten fives are three eighty—three hundred and eighty pounds," and he deftly folded the notes into a bundle and passed it to Michael, who had been standing at his side watching the value of each note as it turned up. The latter held a great yawning pocket-book open and ready to receive the money, and Tasker made a rapid gesture from the notes towards the pocket-book, as though tacitly suggesting that they had better be promptly committed to their proper receptacle.

But Michael Standdridge did not do that. He kept the bundle of notes in one hand, and the pocket-book in the other, and regarded the clerk with the same look of contemptuous amusement he had accorded to him before. There was that in the old miner's look which would have boded trouble to a ricketty conscience, but he spoke very quietly:

"Young man," he said, "I was once in a saloon at Golden City in the Black Hills—a new camp it was, in those days, and things were a bit rough, specially in that saloon. I broke my rule that night, and played faro till all was blue, and, what's more, I won. The chap that held the bank was a broken-down lawyer from the States, and he had to pay me a matter of five hundred dollars. He counted out the notes—ten-dollar notes they were—much the same as you did just now; obliging like, in front of my nose, so as to save me the trouble, he said, in counting them over again. But I noticed that the notes were all turned different ways, and I did count them over again, and I found that a lot of the notes had been cut in two, and the halves made to do duty as whole ones. I should have been about two hundred out on the deal, and there had to be shooting before the matter was settled. Now, I noticed just now that three of these notes were turned different ways to the main bulk—a twenty, a ten, and a five—and I'm open to bet that I'm thirty-five pounds short on what you've given me."

Swinley Tasker's dark face had taken a leaden hue; he held out his hands for the notes.

"Shall I tell you why I am certain of it?" proceeded Michael, disregarding the motion. "Because," he went on grimly, "when I find a young man who displays religious sentiments in his place of business"—Michael pointed to a framed text hanging on the front of the desk—"when I find such a young man uses his employer's time to pick out the winners in a sporting newspaper, and to calculate the odds on a horse-race, as you were doing this morning, I

(*Continued on page 510.*)

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come to the conclusion that that young man's got a screw loose somewhere, and when he hands me notes in precisely the same way as a rascally gambler in a camp saloon I further conclude that the young man is a wrong 'un.

"Not so fast," proceeded Michael as Tasker again essayed to speak. "I'm going to give you a chance. If you like to take these notes again and hand them back to me right, well and good. I don't want to ruin you for the try on. Or if you prefer that I should examine them now, just as they are, I will do so; and if they are right I will make you a present of two of the twenties. Which shall it be?"

Tasker's answer was to hold out a shaking hand for the notes.

With rude delicacy the old miner turned his back for a minute or two and looked out of the window till a faltering voice said;

"You will find them quite correct, sir."

Then he turned, and took the bundle for the second time.

Running through the notes carefully one by one, he looked up at Tasker every time he came to a note that had been recently joined—three had been so treated, one of each amount—and said, "Let this be a warning to you, young man."

And when he had verified the amount, and finally placed the notes in the pocket-book, Michael took Mr. Swinley by the ears, lifted him off the stool, and administered to him one scornful kick. Then he walked quietly out of the office, and was seen no more.

When his footsteps had died away, Tasker slunk into the private room and searched the waste-paper basket for the envelope of Mr. Wilson's letter. He found it without much trouble, and, carrying it to his desk, after a long scrutiny, locked it carefully away.

CHAPTER IV.

From Information Received.

Some way beyond the outskirts of Reading, on the main road that runs westward from the town, stands a pleasant villa residence, protected from the gaze of the too curious wayfarers by a high brick wall backed by a row of stately limes. The refreshing greenery of the tree tops behind the wall gives promise of a cool and shady garden within; and for those privileged to enter the neat iron gates the promise is amply fulfilled.

The house, known as "The Limes," is built back some fifty yards from the road, and the intervening space is covered with the typical pleasaunce of an English house. Inside the boundary wall is a tangled shrubbery, where in the springtime a wealth of laburnum and lilac contrast their gaudy colours with the foliage of the taller trees, giving place nearer the house to trim lawns and bright flower beds, with just a narrow strip between devoted to an old-fashioned rose garden sunk a few feet below the surrounding level, and cut off from a view of the windows by a hedge of yew. Here the standard rose-trees grew out of the mossy turf, marshalled in regular battalions, and almost crowding out the old stone fountain and rustic summer-house in one corner.

On a sunny afternoon in May a girl was sitting in the summer-house making believe to read a book that lay open on her knee, but in reality watching the gap in the hedge by which alone the rose garden could be entered.

A well-grown, healthy, brown-haired girl she was, with honest hazel eyes and a certain firmness about the pretty mouth and chin which gave a look of self-reliance to a face that was in all respects sweet and womanly. This was Michael Standridge's daughter, Marion, discovered by the merest accident only a week before.

It befell in this way.

After disposing of his diamonds, Michael carried out his first intention and went down to Reading—always with the same two objects in view; to find his daughter and to preserve her inheritance till she should be found. His first act was to pay the heavy cheque for £20,000 into the local branch of the bank; then he set to work to systematically hunt the town for traces of his wife and child.

This was a thankless task. His wife's mother had long been dead, and most of the neighbours who had known her were either dead also or had moved away; while the few who remained could tell him nothing of those he sought. His inquiries were the more slow and tedious because in his desire to obliterate his tracks he continued to use the name of Wilson, and it was not till after six weeks' hard work that he became convinced that there was really no information to be got.

But somehow he could not tear himself away from the neighbourhood. After a hurried visit of equally fruitless inquiry to his old house in Dorsetshire, he returned to Reading and looked about for a place in which he could devote himself to safeguarding his modest wealth in his own way, and which he could constitute a headquarters whence to extend his quest.

In his endeavours to find a house Michael was particular in his requirements. The house, he insisted, must be in the country—as far as possible from town or village—and it must be on a clay soil, and with at least a couple of acres of garden or paddock round it. The actual accommodation mattered little; so long as there was stabling for a pony he would soon put the place in order to suit himself.

The house agent to whom he applied happened to have on his books a dilapidated old farmhouse some seven miles from Reading, near a point where the main road westward is intersected by a country lane.

The house stood about a hundred yards up the lane from the high road, and from its position near the juncture was known as Kennett's Cross. Originally it had been the homestead of a farm, but a more modern residence had been built for the use of the farmer a mile away, and Kennett's Cross, with an acre or two of unprofitable land, had been in the market for years.

It was a desolate spot, with no other house for half a mile in either direction, and the building was in bad repair; but Michael, after looking round and turning up a few spadesful of bright yellow clay, bought the freehold right out for three hundred pounds.

When a waggonload of rough and ready furniture had made it to some extent habitable, Michael took up his abode in the old house, and returned, as an amateur to the occupation of his youth. His industry might have suggested the carrying out of a cherished plan.

From morning to night, and day by day, he delved and dug in the paddock, till he had provided himself with great heaps of thick yellow clay which he proceeded to bake into bricks in an extemporised kiln of his own manufacture. As soon as the first batch was finished he carried the bricks into the house; after which he drove his cart into Reading and withdrew from the bank a thousand pounds in gold.

Then he set to work to bake another batch, and when it was finished, again he drew a thousand pounds and carted it home to Kennett's Cross.

These two operations—the baking of bricks and the withdrawal of his money in gold—he continued to alternate till his balance at the bank got low, and folks began to talk of him a little as an eccentric. He made no friends, and the few acquaintances whom the exigencies of life forced upon him were told nothing of his projects; but at the same time he seemed quite careless of the obvious deductions people would be likely to draw from such of his strange proceedings as got about. Indeed once, when he overheard himself spoken of in an inn at Reading as a miser, he smiled with grim content at the imputation.

(To be continued.)

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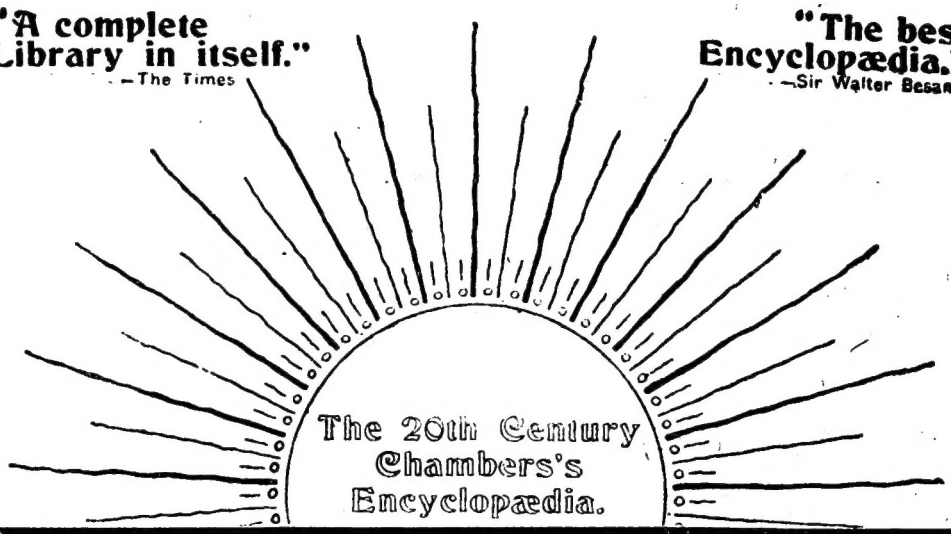

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

I HAVE just completed an hour's perfect enjoyment, and since we are friends, and friendship implies the offer to others of a share of our happiness, I will tell you the nature of my recent pleasure. I have been reading a story—no new thing with me. But in this case the story is of a particularly entrancing kind. It is entitled, "Who Killed James Trent?" and is appearing in serial form in—yes, for your sakes I will overcome my feeling of professional envy, and tell you that it is appearing in PEARSON'S WEEKLY. My friend the editor of that paper is, I notice, offering the really useful sum of £100 to the reader who discovers the murderer and the method of murder. It is no easy task, I assure you, but you ought to try it, nevertheless. However, quite apart from the question of the prize, the story is thoroughly well worth perusal.

THE astounding adventures of "A Keeper of Secrets," which Mr. Norman Silver is writing for us, are becoming familiar to the whole world. A remarkable proof of this is shown in the fact that a lady the other day sent from Walsall a letter addressed, "Hugo Pontifex, Esq., London." It says much for our postal system that this vaguely directed epistle was delivered at *Short Stories* offices the next day.

"MAUD" (Cheltenham) is "tired to death" of life behind a draper's counter. She sighs for a change, and longs to become an actress. How, she asks me, can she accomplish her desire.

My emphatic advice, "Maud," is: Don't try. Doubtless, to one as inexperienced as you are, the life of an actress teems with attractions, beautiful dresses, a big salary, and the applause of the people. But stage life isn't always—it isn't even *generally* that. The "big salary" for a beginner may mean a pound a week, out of which the "beautiful dresses" must be bought. The fact is, the dramatic profession is very much overcrowded. Glance at the theatrical papers, and notice how many well-known, capable, and even distinguished Thespians are seeking engagements. A prominent actor-manager once told me that four months' work per year is as much as the average actor or actress can expect. Don't be an actress, "Maud."

"GEORGE D." has a peculiar experience to record. For some years he went in for bell-ringing, and ever since he has been periodically troubled with peculiar noises in his head which sound like "a muffled campanological peal." He asks me if I have ever heard of a similar case.

I don't think I have. Other men, however, are occasionally haunted by their pursuits. Proof-readers often find it difficult to read merely for amusement; they feel impelled to look out for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. One professional billiardist, at any rate, finds it difficult to sleep after a long spell of play, because the click and run of the balls keep sounding in his head. I myself remember when, many years ago, I was an enthusiastic student of shorthand, how difficult it was to hear anybody talk without making a mental verbatim report, that is, tracing the proper shorthand signs for what the speaker was saying, in my mind. Perhaps my readers can furnish other examples.

"T. G. C." (Streatham).—Somebody has been "having you on toast." Laughing does not cause the disease you mention, nor any other, for that matter. On the contrary, laughing promotes health. A well-known doctor once wrote on the subject:

"There is not the remotest corner or little inlet of the minute blood vessels of the human body that does not feel some wavelet from the convulsions occasioned by good, hearty laughter. The life principle of the central man is shaken to the innermost depths, sending new tides of life and strength to the surface, thus materially tending to insure good health to the persons who indulge therein. The blood moves more rapidly, and conveys a different impression to all the organs of the body, as it visits them on the particular mystic journey when the man is laughing, from what it does at other times. For this reason, every good, hearty laugh in which a person indulges tends to lengthen his life, conveying, as it does, new and distinct stimulus to the vital forces."

"ELTHAM" is going abroad in three weeks. He is engaged to the best little girl in the world, and wants to know whether I think he would be justified in marrying her before he starts. He will be away for two years, and thinks that it would be nice to feel that he has a little wife waiting at home for him.

Very nice, maybe, "Eltham," but not very considerate or kind. It is one thing to go away and leave your *fiancée* behind, but quite another matter to leave your wife. Once married, she has the right to go with you wherever you go, and it would not be fair to leave her alone; you can never tell what will happen to you in that time; you might die, and she would be a widow, though she never really was a wife. Give up all ideas of matrimony until you come back. Two years is not a lifetime.

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Black blocks are charged 25 per cent. extra. All advertisements are subject to approval. All copy must be sent in by Noon on **Tuesday**, April **23rd**, if intended for the issue on sale May **7th**, and dated May **11th**. The Proprietors reserve the right to hold over or suspend the insertion of any advertisement without prejudice to other insertions on order. All communications should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "Pearson's Weekly" Offices, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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...e Industry.

...TY-FIVE years ago an attempt was made in the village of Histon, near Cambridge, to solve the problem, how to make land pay in the face of foreign competition? The country was then at one of its educational epochs. We were being taught the vast food and health value of fruit. Incidentally, also, we were slowly gaining the knowledge that pure sugar, properly treated, was one of the greatest nutrients, in a small compass, with which man has been blessed. Further, that sugar and fruit in combination—when the latter is fresh, ripe, and luscious—makes a most valuable addition to our daily dietary, especially to that of children. The firm gradually expanded until they are now the largest fruit-cultivating jam and jelly makers in Great Britain. The watchwords have been *pure and fresh material*, with the most positive cleanliness in the manufacturing processes. And

as Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies are prepared from the best obtainable materials, and as their delicious flavours are real fruit juices expressed by the firm themselves from fruit grown under their own care, one cannot wonder that Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies have the largest sale and greatest popularity. The *Ladies' Realm*, April, 1900, says: "Chivers' Jellies will be found most welcome delicacies, and are thoroughly nutritious, wholesome, and easily digested." A Lady writes: "We use no other Jellies in this household, having found out their superiority to all others." Another Lady says: "Without a fault—simply perfection."

Chivers' Gold Medal Jams and Table Jellies are sold by Grocers and Stores throughout the United Kingdom. *Insist on being supplied with Chivers'.* A free sample packet of Jelly will be sent on receipt of a post-card. Chivers and Sons Ltd., Histon, Cambridge.

SILVER QUEEN CYCLES.

ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS Enormous Stock. New and second-hand. From **10s.** MONTHLY. Carriage paid. ILLUSTRATED PRICE LISTS POST FREE any address. SILVER QUEEN CYCLE CO. LTD., 221 Tottenham Court Road, London, W.

ATLAS LOCKSTITCH MACHINE.

Works by hand or treadle. Guaranteed 4 years. Equal in quality and size to any machine To ensure satisfaction, we will send machine on receipt of 5/- P.O. for ONE MONTH'S TRIAL. Balance can be paid **5/- Monthly.** Call or write for designs and Samples of work. **39/-**

THE ATLAS SEWING MACHINE CO., 184a High St., Camden Town, London, N.W., 63 Seven Sisters Rd., N.; 14 High Rd., Kilburn.

'ALKAN' CURES IN ONE MINUTE

By Inhalation. The Effect is Marvellous.

The ONE MINUTE Cure

For Headache, Neuralgia, Toothache, Neuralgia of the Ear.

This simple and perfectly harmless remedy has cured instantaneously thousands suffering from the above complaints. READ THESE TESTIMONIALS:

Mrs. KENDAL, the Eminent Actress, writes: "That she has used the 'Alkan' Anti-Neuralgic Water with entirely satisfactory results, gives full permission to use her name in extolling the virtues of this excellent remedy for neuralgia, and has no hesitation in highly recommending it to all sufferers from this distressing pain."

Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent.

Her Grace the Duchess of S——, writes: "That she thinks the 'Alkan' Anti-Neuralgic Water an excellent remedy, and has also given it to friends, with good results. Kindly send Her Grace two more bottles of 'Alkan' the same size as the last."

Balgreggan, Sandhead, N.B.

"I have tried your excellent 'Anti-Neuralgic Water' and have much pleasure in saying it cured me at once. I have tried it on my friends with the same good result, and I consider it a marvellous remedy.

L. MAITLAND.

Nurse FINCH-WHITE writes from the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow: "I have very great pleasure to inform you that I have found the 'Alkan' most beneficial, and in each case instantaneous. I shall be very pleased to recommend it to anyone unfortunately afflicted with neuralgic troubles, as I cannot speak of the preparation too highly, both as regards its effect upon myself as an old sufferer from neuralgic pains, and also its effect upon those to whom I gave it. It is magical, and is deserving of the highest praise."

Of all Chemists and Stores, Prices 2/9 & 4/6 per bottle.

Sent post paid to any part of the United Kingdom on receipt of price.

Or of the Proprietors,

B. & G. ALKAN, *General Depot,* **150 STRAND, LONDON, W.C.**

A FREE GIFT.

500 40-EGG INCUBATORS.

Ladies and Gentlemen can greatly increase their incomes by **POULTRY BREEDING**, thus converting 1d. Eggs into 1s. Chickens. To encourage this industry we intend supplying each applicant during the next 28 days with one of our **40-Egg Incubators.**

Write for **Free Gift Form** to THE POULTRY BREEDERS' APPLIANCE CO., 422 Kingsland Road, London, N.E.

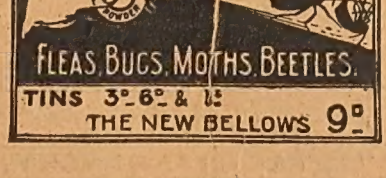
THE ONLY EFFICACIOUS SUBSTITUTE FOR COD LIVER OIL.

DEVONSHIRE CREAM

(Really Genuine). In Patent Air-tight Tins. ½-lb., 1/4; 1-lb., 2/4; 2-lb., 4/-, including Tin & Postage.

Mrs. CONYERS, Morchard Bishop, DEVON.

KEATING'S POWDER



JUNO CYCLES FOR LADIES & CENTS.

THE VERY BEST.

Discount for Cash.

FREE or FIXED WHEELS The most up-to-date. Carriage Paid.

	Monthly.
£8 10s.	14/2
£11 11s.	19/3
£12	20/-
£12 12s.	21/-
£14 14s.	24/6

LISTS POST FREE

Write for New Season's List. **JUNO** Cycles and Accessories (over 100 pages) sent Post Free. Hatherly Hard Wood Cycle Stand, 2/6. Handlebar Basket, 10½d.

JUNO ... £10 ... 16/8 monthly.
Lady Safety ... £11 ... 18/4 monthly.

METROPOLITAN MACHINISTS CO. LTD., Juno Cycle School, and Works, 75. 76 Bishopsgate Street Without E.C., and Piccadilly Circus, London, W.

DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.,** Sole Proprietors, **66 Finsbury Pavement, London.**

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Walnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 2½lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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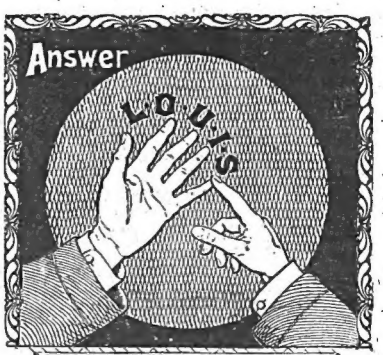
HOW DO YOU SPELL VELVETEEN?



FIVE LETTERS ONLY.

Don't Forget this when You Buy.

Every Yard is Stamped L-O-U-I-S

WHEN BUYING A CHEAP BICYCLE,

look at the tyres. If they are not

DUNLOP TYRES

the machine is not cheap at any price.

Trade Mark.

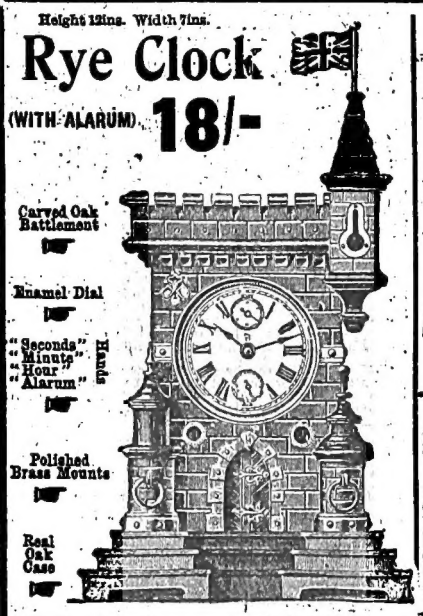
The DUNLOP PNEUMATIC TYRE CO., Ltd.,
Factory: Alma Street, Coventry;
160 Clerkenwell Road, E.C., London.

Branches: Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Nottingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Dublin, &c.

Height 12ins. Width 7ins.

Rye Clock

(WITH ALARUM) **18/-**



A FREE TRIAL FOR 2/6

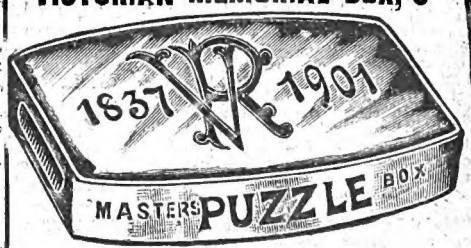
OUR
20th CENTURY CATALOGUE
containing illustrations of Watches, Clocks, Jewellery, &c., &c., at 20 per cent. below London prices will be sent to any address on receipt of postcard.

WE YOU IF will supply any reader of *Short Stories* with one of these **18/-** Alarum Clocks on monthly payments as follows: send us **2/6** with your name and address, and we will send you one on approval. you approve of it, you send us **3/-** on receipt, and **2/6** each month for five months, making the full **18/-**.

BUT OUR NET-CASH-WITH-ORDER PRICE IS **16/-** ONLY.

And we will refund the Cash sent, if you do not approve of the Clock, and you return it at once. (Signed) J. N. MASTERS.

VICTORIAN MEMORIAL BOX, 6D.



J. N. MASTERS Ltd., RYE, designers of the Victorian Memorial Watches (25/- each) SUPPLIED TO ROYALTY, have now designed a Victorian Memorial Box (as above).

These V.R. Puzzle Boxes are Silver-Plated, and durable, they can be used for Matches, Trinkets, Stamps, Pins, Rings, Pens, or even Money, as they cannot be opened unless the Secret is known. When you send **6d.** for a Box, our Catalogue will also be sent you and a Coupon value **6d.**, which we will allow **6d.** for on your first cash order. OR we will send a **1/6** Jam Spoon (as shown) and Victorian Box for **18** Stamps.

This Puzzle Box will cause you and your friends hours of amusement trying to open it.

A Lady writes: "Thanks for the Box but cannot open it. Will it open at all?" Reply: "Oh, yes, do so and so.")

For **6 penny stamps** (which is less than the cost of the Box and Postage) we will send a **V.R. Puzzle Box** and our **Catalogue** *FREE* to any address. Any name engraved on box 6d. extra.

BOX 6d. Free.

J. N. MASTERS LIMITED. "VERACITY" WATCHMAKERS, &c., RYE, SUSSEX.

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